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Bolivia - Venezuela

and the Revolt in Latin America

FORTRESS IRELAND - After the Afghan hunger strike
Behind the veil of lies - Iran

NEW LEFT JOURNAL

Summer 2006

Welcome to the first issue of New Left Journal.

We hope, in these pages, to capture some of the anger and resistance against corporate capitalism—across the globe and in Ireland. We want to help expose what neoliberal Ireland is doing to our services, our education, our workplaces, our health and quality of life, to our cities and natural resources, and how their interests are enthusiastically represented by the mainstream political parties.

NLJ seeks to develop a radical alternative view to neoliberal economics and privatisation—something that the traditional left is sorely lacking—and challenge the right-wing consensus in Ireland. Such an alternative will only take shape if all voices for socialist change are heard so we will be including representatives of different campaigns and political traditions.

In this way, we hope that New Left Journal may become a genuine forum of the anti-war movement, of anti-racism and the battles against the neoliberal agenda in Ireland. We look forward to hearing what you think of the issues discussed.

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Editor Marnie Holborow
 Editorial Board Fiona Boyd, Deirdre Cronin, Peadar O'Grady
 Design Aidan Daly
 Production Kevin Wingfield
 Email letters or comments to marnie@swp.ie

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FORTRESS IRELAND: After the Afghan hunger strike



Afghan hunger strikers in St Patrick's Cathedral

Photo: Paula Geraghty

By Dave Lordan

On the evening of Saturday 20th of May, as hundreds of thousands around Ireland were glued to the emotionless schlock called Eurovision, a drama involving all too real pain and desperation was taking place in St Patrick's Cathedral Dublin. As the shadows of the Cathedral and its spire were lengthening into dusk, columns of dark-clad riot police were entering the supposed sanctuary to arrest and remove 41 Afghan asylum seekers.

The Afghans had occupied the church the previous Sunday, claiming protection in the "House of God" and declaring themselves on hunger and thirst strike to the death, unless the Irish government relented and allowed them to stay in Ireland.

There is no doubt that the Afghans were justified in not wanting to return to their country, which, after twenty seven years of incessant warfare, ranks as one of the most dangerous places in the world. As we go to press, the newswires are reporting that 76 Afghans have been killed in an air strike by US forces, many of them already admitted to be civilians. A regrouped Taliban is capitalising on the widespread hatred of Western troops to launch an all

out offensive in the South of the country and dozens are daily being killed and maimed.

Hamid Karzai, the puppet president of Afghanistan, is widely derided by his countrymen as the "Mayor of Kabul". Outside Kabul and some other cities, Afghanistan is in the hands of warlords, many of whom are fuelling their private armies by income from the opium boom which has been the one noticeable economic result of the western military occupation.

While arable land is being cleared of corn to make way for poppies, three and a half million people are in need of food aid. Awaiting famine, starvation rubs its greedy hands, while the occupiers go on grinding Afghanistan and all who live there into dust and bone.

Even the Irish Department of Foreign affairs warns against all non-essential travel to Kabul and against all travel to other parts of Afghanistan. It states that the security situation in Afghanistan remains serious and the threat to Westerners from terrorist or criminal violence, including kidnappings, remains high. Irish citizens travelling to Kabul are urged to exercise extreme caution and vigilance throughout their visit.

Given the enormous mismatch in the figures for casualties between "westerners" and "easterners" in all the various arenas of Bush and Blair's war, we can safely assume that the risk to life and limb of Afghan asylum seekers, if they are to be forcibly returned, is grave indeed.

Yet the Irish refugee system fails to recognise the danger that faces those who have the misfortune to cross its path. To be recognised as a refugee in Ireland you have to go through a very stringent test. Even if you have experienced war and extreme danger, and may face death on return to your country, you are likely not to pass the test. Unlike other countries, Ireland fails to factor in an assessment of human rights protection.

The number of people who actually obtain asylum status in Ireland is a small percentage, and well below other countries like Austria (who, despite its firm immigration image, gives protection to 50% of all who seek asylum there). On top of this, any appeal on the part of an asylum seeker is subject to an arbitrary process and veiled in secrecy. The vast majority are refused and the outcome depends more on who heard the case than fair deliberation. The Irish Refugee Appeals Tribunal is the only

tribunal of its kind in the English-speaking world not to publish its decisions. These are the stark facts behind McDowell's claims of a fair system.

Unfortunately the justice of a cause has never been a guarantee of its triumph, and the ending of the hunger strike by state intervention, without any leeway given on the demands of the strikers, marks a political victory for the right.

This victory has restored a much-needed aura of public authority to the PD Minister for Justice Michael McDowell, whose mishandling of numerous controversies in recent times had made him a figure much more likely to be satirized than respected. It has also, though only temporarily, papered over the splits between McDowell and the Gardai that were emerging around the issue of the Garda reserve force.

It has widened the political space for racism which, though it is unlikely to be filled in the short term by an Irish version of the BNP, will undoubtedly be utilized by politicians of the traditional right in the run-up to the general election.

It is symptomatic of the disconnection of refugees from Irish society in general that the Afghans had to take such desperate measures for their case to be noticed. That they felt such an immediately stake-raising measure as to threaten mass suicide might work is also evidence of their disconnection from the networks of the social movements.

Irish immigration policy is directly responsible for the limbo space that asylum seekers inhabit. They cannot work. They are "dispersed". They are finger-printed and criminalised. Everything is done to segregate asylum-seekers from Irish society.

As such, they find themselves at the bottom of the society, with an income which is below twenty percent of the national household average income, living in cramped conditions, socially and culturally excluded. They are subject to a system of "direct provision", which denies even the dignity and independence of being able to cook their own meals.

As one writer on Irish immigration, Stephen Loyal, has said, the alienation of their lives "marks the nadir of the values of the Celtic Tiger".

In Cork, in Letterkenny, in Waterford, Sligo and in many parts of Dublin, it has been left up to community activists to build asylum seekers' life-lines to society. In this respect, despite the government's attempts to stigmatize and point the racist finger, many people on the ground have done all they can to welcome the newcomers.

Equally, the tremendous solidarity shown during the Irish Ferries dispute towards immigrant workers was also part of the same anti-racism that many Irish people are proud to identify with. Unfortunately the St Patrick's hunger strike was unable to tap into that mood and score a victory against the strident racism of McDowell's asylum policy.

We need to learn quickly from this setback, particularly because we saw the emergence of small but vocal counter demonstrations using racist slogans to call for the Afghans to be removed and thrown

out of the country.

There may have been a couple of hardened racists agitating in the local area, but the bulk of the counter demonstrators were locals intent on taking out there own justifiable frustrations with Celtic Tiger inequality on the other victims ensconced across the road. This should not be blown out of proportion, and, as I will argue below, the mishandling of the locals by some protesters contributed significantly to the raising of tensions in the area, but it must serve as a warning of what might be coming down the line if the left does not get its act together fast.

Let's cast our minds forward a couple of years to when the housing bubble has burst, the building boom ground to a halt, the unemployment rate rapidly climbing and social services still mired in underfunding and continual crisis. The encounters between left wing activists and the throw-them-out brigade that took place outside St Patrick's cathedral will look like a garden party. France, Italy and Britain have shown us that, where economic downturns happen, mass racist movements emerge in situations of widespread social crisis, particularly where expectations—social and political—have not been met.

This should serve to remind us that the root causes of racism lie in economic and social injustices, and in the deliberate pitting of the victims of these injustices against each other by those who rule over our society.

Neoliberal Ireland is characterised by extreme and growing inequality in income levels and in access to the provision of social services like housing and healthcare. The Irish elite can get away with this partly because they shift a large portion of the blame onto refugees and immigrants. In this, they are ably and enthusiastically assisted by the press, who never tire of scandal mongering about immigrant workers and refugees.

The abandonment of the poorest com-

Neoliberal Ireland is characterised by extreme and growing inequality in income levels and in access to the provision of social services like housing and healthcare. The Irish elite can get away with this partly because they shift a large portion of the blame onto refugees and immigrants.

munities by the reformist parties like the Labour Party is another key factor in the spread of soft racism among wide sections of the Irish working class.

This "Dagenham Factor" often results in their being no one counter-argument to racist ideas being put across in working class communities.

Neither can we entirely rely on Sinn Fein, the party with the most support among the inner city communities most vulnerable to the cancer of racism, given that a principled anti-racist stand may well be a vote-loser.

Refusal to rule out coalition with right-wing parties, whether it is Sinn Fein or Labour, in practice means making concessions to "Fortress Ireland". Fine Gael's Jim O'Keefe leapt to McDowell's defence over the Afghan case, and you can be assured that their pact with Labour is still safe.

Failure to recognize the real causes of racism and to provide a strategy to uproot it, was unfortunately all too evident during the St Patrick's Cathedral Protests. Half way through the week one of the spokes-people for the Afghan supporters web-published an article attacking left-wing organisations for not sending enough members to man the twice-daily vigils at the cathedral.

This was sadly reminiscent of the kind of sectarian bickering and point scoring that has been the real obstacle to sustaining a broad based anti-war movement in this country. It was also quite clearly a ridiculous strategy.

Even if every activist in Dublin had stood at the gates of St Patrick's Cathedral 24/7 it would not have altered the wider balance of forces in Irish society that contributed to the hunger strikers' defeat. Instead of arguing that activists should substitute themselves for a mass anti-racist movement, all energies should have been put into gaining wider support for the hunger strikers, not least among those living in the vicinity of St Patrick's Cathedral.

The way some dealt with the anger at the hunger strikers expressed by some of the locals was self-defeating. The whole country listened to a broadcast on Radio One's 5-7 live of one over heated activist engage in a drawn-out slugging match with a local. The exchange was peppered with choice expletives on both sides.

In the background we could here a rising chorus of "RACISTS OUT, RACISTS OUT" directed at a crowd of locals gathered across the road. The effect of such intemperate argument is, as everyone who has been in a pub late at night should know, to escalate tensions and to entrench the opposing sides within their own positions.

In other words, if activists adopt a preaching tone with those who have been conned into believing the racist myths generated by the tabloids and the right-wing politicians, the effect will be to drive people further into the arms of the racists.

A calm, reasonable, well argued approach is what is needed when confronting racist sentiments in Irish workers. Do they want to be on the same side as Harney and Ahern? Is it the refugees who closed down the local hospital? It is not refugees who decide how much the local builder pays, and so on. Of course taking on arguments on an individual basis is only



School students supporting the Afghan hunger strikers

Photo: Paula Geraghty

part of the answer.

There must also be a willingness to campaign alongside working class communities on the issues which directly affect them, whether that be fighting the bin tax or campaigning against the closure of a local school.

We must stand beside working class people when they take on the bosses, bureaucrats and bullies, even when they are under the influence of racist ideas. This is how activists can win the trust and respect among wide layers of workers that will be necessary in the long term to take on and win the political arguments around issues such as racism.

The most crucial element of an effective anti-racist strategy will be workplace organisation. The great majority of immigrants are, after all, not refugees but workers.

The strategy of Irish bosses is to use immigrant labour to undercut the wages and conditions of all workers. Involving immigrants in workplace organisation and struggles is the only way to counter this strategy. In the aftermath of the Irish Ferries dispute, the unions are beginning to take seriously the issue of organising immigrant workers and SIPTU have recruited 16,000 and appointed multilingual organisers. Every union should be pressurised into doing the same and more.

Again, without political organisation that both counters racist arguments and organises workers to defend their conditions, many will be tempted to lay the blame on immigrants. But the opposite is also true: the more organised and self con-

fident working class people are about the justice of their own cause and about their ability to improve their plight by their own collective efforts, the less soil there is for racism to take root. Successful strikes marginalise racists and leave little room for blaming immigrants for workers' problems.

Anti-racism is not a moral stand, nor a holier-than-thou place. Socialist ideas are important here. A view which understands the overall political system helps to give a more rounded and progressive analysis of the world we live in.

It is class not colour that divides people, and therefore ganging up against people who are exploited and oppressed only

serves those that rule and the power of the capitalist class.

Building unity between immigrant and Irish, asylum-seekers and the homeless, black and white, is a political necessity if we are to challenge the way we are ruled.

We will have to go out and spread those ideas and organisation as far and wide as possible in working class areas all over Ireland if we are going to have any chance of wiping away the racism of the Celtic Tiger.

That means building a much bigger socialist left. The Afghan hunger strike shows we have a long way to go to achieve this. Let's get going.

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Bolivia, Venezuela and the revolt in Latin America



A meeting of indigenous people from El Alto

by Peadar O'Grady

Sweeping changes in Latin America are a reason for socialists across the world to celebrate and provide genuine examples of successful mass movements we can learn from. Evo Morales' victory in Bolivia's presidential elections and his subsequent nationalisation of Bolivian gas reserves are just symptoms of a wider revolt from below against the injustice and inequality visited upon the people of Latin America by three decades of neoliberalism.

The ability of Latin American mass movements to fightback and win with such seeming regularity is inspiring a new generation of activists far beyond the continent itself. The wave of resistance encompasses many kinds of struggles from the revolt of the Venezuelan Caracazo or the Argentinazo in Argentina to the ongoing rising of the Zapatistas and the protests of Latino immigrants against oppression in the US. The movements are, however, most advanced in Bolivia and Venezuela. These two countries have become laboratories of social progress and experiment which activists across the globe are eagerly interested in following.

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Bolivia's revolt

On May 1st this year the newly elected President, Evo Morales, announced the nationalisation of Bolivia's gas fields after 100 days in office. The choice of Mayday, International Worker's Day, was symbolic. It also reflected the demands, of the mass movement that brought him to power, that the nationalisation be implemented by May or protests would restart.

Before nationalisation, Bolivia's population benefited little from their massive gas reserves—they received neither a proper share of the profits nor cheap gas or electricity. Less than one in fifty Bolivian homes is supplied with gas! 90% of Bolivia's gas is exported, and of the remaining 10% most is used to generate electricity, which is Spanish-owned, expensive and received by less than half of the people. The people of Bolivia will now own a majority stake in the oil and gas fields as well as the refineries and pipelines. This will raise the Bolivian government's annual gas revenue from \$320m to \$780m. Morales declared: "The plunder has ended". Well, with just a majority stake, perhaps the majority of the plunder has ended at least.

With one voice the multinationals and

G8 leaders expressed "surprise". Since nationalisation had been the central plank of Morales' election campaign the only surprise could have been that a political leader was honouring an election promise. Morales has also cut MPs' salaries by half, granted wage increases to health and education workers and promised to subsidise the prices of food and fuel.

Despite its natural resources, and alongside a five star elite smothering themselves in luxury, Bolivia has the highest rates of poverty in South America and the second highest, after Haiti, in all of Latin America (which includes Central America and the Caribbean). Its population is 80% indigenous. These peoples include the Aymara and Quechua people of the alti-plano, the mountainous agricultural, industrial and mining region which includes the capital La Paz and its huge, working class satellite city, El Alto. The other main regions are around the cities of Cochabamba and Santa Cruz to the East where the large oil and gas reserves are.

Bolivia's gas reserves were only discovered in the last decade and are the second biggest in Latin America after Venezuela. They have so far been largely

controlled by foreign multinational oil and gas corporations like Brazil's Petrobras, Spain's Repsol, France's Total, and Britain's BP and BG. Plans to build a pipeline through Chile and divert the gas to California and the US market have been halted. The world famous campaign against water privatisation in 2000 has grown into a countrywide movement for the nationalisation of Bolivia's hydrocarbons (oil and gas). A well organised and funded resistance to the nationalisation is crystallising around an alliance of the Santa Cruz oligarchy, the energy multinationals, and powerful states like the US who have an interest in continuing the looting of Bolivia's resources.

A history of struggle

The Bolivian revolution of 1952 saw the tin and silver miners' revolutionary union COB at the heart of popular revolt. However, the failure to introduce thorough land reform or nationalisation meant that by the early 1980s the radicalism of the working class movement was on the wane. As the mining industry collapsed most miners were thrown out of work and dispersed. Today the working class is small, consisting of oil workers, small groups of miners and public servants like teachers and health workers. Most workers are in small workshops of less than ten workers, or are artisans or craftsmen.

From 1985, neoliberal policies meant agriculture was restructured around export crops and the economy opened up to the import of cheaper food, thus bankrupting poor peasant farmers who turned increasingly to coca farming. Coca leaves are traditionally consumed in Bolivia by chewing or in the form of a tea, which gives miners and farmers the stamina to work at high altitude.

By the late 90s, worldwide cocaine production from coca leaves represented 8% of global trade. US policy was to attack the source of the leaf rather than to address the social roots of its own citizens' consumption of cocaine, or to attack the traffickers and profiteers like President Hugo Banzer (1993-97) who they instead asked to implement coca leaf eradication programmes! Evo Morales came to prominence as a union organiser of the coca farmers (cocaleros) against these attacks on their livelihood.

In 1978, a new indigenous peasant farmers' organisation (the CSUTCB) was formed under the influence of the Tupac Katari Revolutionary Movement and has been headed since 1996 by an Aymara leader, Felipe Quispe. In the past, indigenous demands were ignored and marginalised but over the past two decades communal resistance and mass confrontation against the state by indigenous groups in both rural and urban areas have been at the heart of the popular movement in Bolivia.

Throughout the 80s and 90s, the global neoliberal institutions like the IMF and the World Bank targeted Bolivia as a model for aggressive integration into the world market. In the early nineties a series of IMF "Structural Adjustment Programmes" were implemented by a former leader of the 1952 revolution, Paz Estenssoro. These led to the privatisation of much of the economy

including education, followed swiftly by a major increase in illiteracy.

In the mid-nineties President Sanchez de Lozada introduced a neoliberal reform, the "Plan de Todos" (Plan for All) which privatised the public utilities including electricity, railways, telephones and most importantly the Bolivian national oil company YPF. This neoliberal sell-off brought massive fortunes to the rich but delivered only sluggish economic growth. The average annual per capita income in 1980 of \$940 rose by only \$20 to \$960 by 2003.

The water and gas rebellions

In 1999, following a World Bank plan, the government sold off the country's water resources to US multinational Bechtel in the Cochabamba region and to the French owned Suez in El Alto. Bechtel, the sole bidder in Cochabamba put up just \$20,000 for a water system worth millions.

The World Bank demanded "no public subsidies". The predicted massive rise in water prices would have meant poor Bolivians paying up to a quarter of their income on water alone! This sparked an explosion of popular rage and a revolt in early 2000 which pulled together the disparate forces of community organisations, indigenous movements, students, coca farmers and unionised workers into a powerful fighting force. An organisation was formed, the Coordinadora del Agua (Water Coordinating Committee) under the leadership of a machinist in his mid-forties, Oscar Olivera.

Small road blockades, initially organised by farmers, quickly swelled into mass mobilisations blocking motorways and huge demonstrations and strikes. Protests spread to El Alto and La Paz against the sell-off to Suez.

It was above all the unity and coordination of different organisations that was the stamp of this new movement and it brought the government to its knees, won back water under democratic public control and expelled the multinational water companies from the country.

In taking on water privatisation the movement was confronted with and politicised by the strategies and power of the multinationals, the neoliberal institutions and the US government. Into the mix was thrown the history of the left and the working classes, the complexities of community organisations and the strength of the

In El Alto, the Popular Assembly declared the city to be 'the general headquarters of the Bolivian revolution of the 21st century' and issued its central demand: the nationalisation of hydrocarbons.

indigenous movement.

The movement grows

After the victory against water privatisation the floodgates were opened. Protests in El Alto in February 2003 against a 9% increase in taxes and for land reform were attacked by police leaving 4 farmers dead. On the 19 September a massive 500,000-strong demonstration in La Paz, led by Felipe Quispe, called for the nationalisation of oil and gas. The marchers encircled La Paz and called a "paro civico"—a general civic strike. President Lozada refused to answer the demands, sending in troops to attack demonstrators, killing 70 and wounding hundreds. Unable to force through further privatisation, Lozada fled the country to be replaced by Mesa.

Morales party, the Movement towards Socialism (MAS), tried moderating its demands for nationalisation to just a 50% tax on oil companies instead, but the movement was not impressed and the MAS vote was cut in half at the 2004 elections.

Demands for the nationalisation of hydrocarbons came to a head in May and June 2005 with a further wave of protests and strikes. 119 highways were blocked, oil workers shut down oil pipelines and airline workers shut all the country's airports. President Carlos Mesa refused to concede on nationalisation and was forced to resign. In El Alto the Popular Assembly declared the city of El Alto to be: "the general headquarters of the Bolivian revolution of the 21st century" and issued its central demand: the nationalisation of hydrocarbons. It agreed to form peoples' assemblies in every area and rejected electoral solutions.

Faced with the threat of a military dictatorship and secession by the Santa Cruz, right-wing senator, Vaca Diez, presidential candidate Evo Morales cut a compromise deal to end protests in return for elections at the end of the year. The movement faltered and Morales went on to win the presidential election with 54% of votes—the highest vote ever in Bolivia—and became the first president of indigenous descent in Bolivia's history.

Lessons of the movement

Cochabamba leader, Oscar Olivera summed up the state of the movement in 2005:

"In this mobilisation we have seen two things. On one hand we, the various social movements, are capable of paralysing the entire country, and of countering the manoeuvres of the businessmen and bad politicians. On the other hand, we have not been capable of imposing our own decisions and objectives...Based on these two considerations, we have opened a wide debate in all the neighbourhoods and communities of Cochabamba and the country about the need to build, little by little, our own capacity for self-government to push for that in the next mobilisation. Our immense strength should correspond to a great and creative capacity to carry out our own decisions beyond the official institutions and traditional political parties, which always drive us to the edge of the precipice. On this occasion, this has begun to happen with the occupation of hydrocarbon wells, gas plants and refineries, and

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Bolivian workers demonstration

on the next occasion we must be capable of operating them ourselves for our own good."

As President, Morales has moved to appease capitalists by appointing corrupt right-wing politicians and industrialists to his cabinet. He has also failed to increase the minimum wage or to support the LAB airline workers strike for nationalisation of the airline, or to give maximum effect to nationalisation—full expropriation of all gas and oil resources without compensation to the multinationals.

However, the future of Bolivia lies in what the mass movement does next. How the self-government, advocated by activists like Olivera, is won will only be answered on the streets of Bolivia by a united and nationally coordinated mass movement.

Chavez and the Latin American revolt

Early in 2006, Colombia and Peru signed a free trade agreement with the US which would mean cheap grain imports for those countries and disaster for Bolivia's soy bean exports, their main agricultural product. In April, Morales met with Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Fidel Castro of Cuba to sign a People's Trade Agreement. The deal secured a contract for Bolivia's soy Beans in return for oil from Venezuela and doctors from Cuba. Chavez announced that Venezuela was pulling out of the Andean Communities bloc and restated his proposal for an alternative to the US-backed Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA or "ALCA" in Spanish). A trade meeting in Argentina in 2005 was a humiliating failure for George Bush when other South American leaders rejected ALCA under pressure from protests outside the meeting led by Chavez and popular

footballer Diego Maradona.

Hugo Chavez is now the figurehead for a strategy of resistance to US domination in Latin America and the possible alternative of international cooperation rather than neoliberal competition. Chavez' rise to power started with the "Caracazo" of 1989—an explosion of protests and attacks on rich neighbourhoods and shops triggered by a neoliberal policy of cutting fuel subsidies. In 1989 the then president Carlos Andres Perez adopted a full neoliberal programme of subsidy cuts and privatisation to address a failing economy.

The shock announcement of subsidy cuts meant huge increases in fuel and transport costs. Students lost their free travel benefits and took to the streets sparking wider protests from the poor of the Barrios—the poor suburbs of unplanned housing which stretch up the hillsides surrounding Caracas. Police and army repression killed thousands of civilians.

Neoliberalism

Despite enormous natural resources like oil, gas, gold and diamonds, Venezuela is a country with mass poverty and a mega-rich elite. In 1984, just before the onset of neoliberal reforms, the proportion of the population below the poverty line was 36%, by 1995 it was 66% and extreme poverty had tripled from 11% to 35%. In addition, while the share of national income of the poorest two-fifths fell from 19% to 15% between 1981 and 1997, the share of the richest tenth jumped from 22% to 33%. In 1998, the year of Chavez election, two-thirds of Venezuelans earned less than \$2 a day.

The failure of neoliberal policies and the corruption of the traditional right-wing parties left a political vacuum in Venezuelan politics similar to what was

happening elsewhere in Latin America. In Brazil, Argentina and Chile that gap was filled by left-wing nationalists or Labour-type social democrats like Lula, Kirchner and Bachelet who continued to impose neoliberal policies. In Venezuela the failed military coup of popular army colonel, Hugo Chavez, in 1992, filled that gap and led to his successful presidential election campaign in 1998.

Chavez in power looked to reform the judiciary and parliament through democratically and successfully introducing a new constitution and constituent assembly but also attempted to secure revenues from the monumentally corrupt state oil and gas company PDVSA which had been nationalised in 1976. He described his political strategy as a "Bolivarian revolution" after Simon Bolivar the 19th century general whose army liberated the entire Andean region from Spanish colonialism and created Venezuela itself.

Of course, the rich of Venezuela did not take this lying down and launched several attacks. The first and most serious was a CIA-backed military coup in April 2002 in which right-wing generals and businessmen seized the presidential palace and took Chavez hostage. The Fedecameras (Business Federation) leader declared himself President and abolished parliament. The excellent documentary "The revolution will not be televised" brilliantly conveys what happened next. Tens of thousands of Chavez supporters, from all over the city but especially the Barrios, fought their way through police lines, in a massive march, to surround the palace demanding their president back. The coup leaders were thrown into confusion and fled.

PDVSA bosses backed by the corrupt CTV union federation launched a lock-out the following November, but it was broken

after several weeks by the opposition of oil workers and the failure to split Chavez' support. Oil production was hard hit and took some time to recover. A recall referendum against Chavez in 2004 similarly failed with Chavez increasing his support to 60%.

Oil, the Iraq war and the misiones

Chavez' increasingly radical rhetoric against US imperialism and for "Socialism in the 21st century" has agitated the US ruling class. The Iraq war has meant, however, that the US military are bogged down and that world oil prices have more than doubled. This, and the opening up of trade with the EU, China and other Latin American countries, means resistance to US domination is a more practical option than ever before. This has given Chavez the breathing space for survival and allowed him the revenues from oil to fund his excellent health, educational and social (eg food, fuel and housing) programmes called misiones (missions) in the Barrios and around the country.

The misiones have meant real gains in the welfare of poor Venezuelans. However Chavez has so far failed to break the hold of Venezuelan capitalists on key areas of the economy like manufacture or the media. The corruption of senior civil service bureaucrats, police, judges and army officers also means the money and power of Venezuela is still largely in the hands of those who are trying to overthrow Chavez and smash the popular movements.

The way that Chavez and Morales have created their own trade agreement with Cuba shows how trade could be conducted along different parameters to profit, and how peoples' needs can be placed first. Cuba's stature has been greatly enhanced by Castro's stand alongside the people of Venezuela and Bolivia.

Despite this, whether Castro's Cuba offers the way forward for real people's power needs to be debated in the movements. It may well be that extending and deepening the people's reliance on their own organising strength in Venezuela and Bolivia could become a model for many in Cuba as well and, they too, start taking things into their own hands.

In Venezuela, as in Bolivia a variety of social movements from community organisations, indigenous groups, peasant and workers unions are campaigning for reforms.

An alternative trade union group the UNT, a revolutionary socialist party the PRS, the grassroots April 13th movement, and factory occupations, all reflect evidence of real movements from below but these are small and weak. As with the MAS in Bolivia, Chavez' MVR party has attracted opportunists and tended to restrict the mass movement towards electioneering or cheerleading for Chavez.

The future for Latin America

Socialists are fully behind Chavez and Morales when they are under attack from

their rich elites, the Pentagon or the CEO's of the multinational looters they are booting out of their country. But we are also aware of the limitations of left-wing populism, no matter how courageous and genuine are its figureheads. The danger is that too much of the peoples' hope will be invested in their charismatic leaders and too little in their own ability to reorganise society from the bottom up.

Chavez and Morales will gladly admit that they have been raised to and kept in power by mass movements. They may not be prepared to see that their radical reformism is not the end of the story for social change in Latin America. Indeed the very movements that created and sustain them are part of a continent-wide trajectory towards a more thoroughgoing social change.

That will only come when the peoples' movements go beyond infiltrating the existing corrupt institutions of society, to



Grassroots meeting in El Alto

replacing them with their own far more democratic versions.

The declaration of the popular assembly in El Alto in June 2005, at a point when the situation in Bolivia was beginning to resemble revolutionary dual power, shows that these are not the utopian dreams of western activists, but are part of the agenda of the most radical sections of the Latin American movements.

Some believe that the movements in Venezuela and Bolivia have gone far enough or that they need to slow down. They argue that to push for more economic and social justice will provoke a vicious response from the US and local elites. But it is not possible to freeze time or slow down history. In Latin America country after country has rejected imposed neoliberal solutions after suffering the economic failures and inequality that goes with privatisation and tax cuts for the rich.

The US will not be distracted in the Middle East forever and there will be repeated attempts by the dispossessed multinationals and their allies to reimpose their order at whatever cost in blood and misery to the working people of Latin America.

The weeping ghost of Allende hovers in the background behind the always cheerful Chavez and Morales. The populist Chilean president was slaughtered in 1973 along with almost the entire Chilean radical left. Allende had made the mistake of attempting to slow the pace of social change in the interests of keeping the peace with the old

order. Chilean workers and peasants made the mistake of obeying him. John Negroponte orchestrated the terrorist and drug-trafficking Contras against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua in the 1980s. He is now US Director of National Intelligence and issues regular threats against Chavez.

To avoid repeating the tragedies of the 1970's and 80s the workers and peasants of Latin America will have to trust only their own power, continue to unite to campaign for large scale change, and spread their organisations and struggles beyond the borders of their own national territories. The time is ripe for revolution in Latin America.

Oscar Olivera, leader of the Cochabamba movement, expressed that hope in a seminar in La Paz in June of 2000:

"For the true nation not to be supplanted by the market or the state, the working class, both urban and rural, and the marginalised and economically

insecure of the nation—in other words, the overwhelming majority of society—must assume control over the wealth embodied in hydrocarbons. And they must do so through assembly-style forms of self-organisation at the neighbourhood, regional and national levels. The nation must enact a self-representation—it must self-govern through autonomous structures of participation that socialise responsibility for public life."

There is much we in Ireland can learn from these struggles. The nature of globalisation and the neoliberal agenda across the world means that the fight in Bolivia and Venezuela against privatisation and for the nationalisation of natural resources has immediate application here.

What these struggles have shown is that neoliberalism can be opposed but also that while fighting back attacks an alternative from below becomes a possibility. Chavez speaks of a new socialism for the 21st century, and the movement on the ground in his country and in Bolivia points to the shape that new model can take. This can fan revolt elsewhere and inspire us to take on our own rulers to end the war and injustice of neoliberal capitalism.

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Iran, war and the position of Iranian women

By Sara O'Rourke

In a period where the conquest of the Middle East has been the focus of the US imperialist agenda, notions of Islam and of resistance have become tangled and distorted as the US pushes for control of the region. America's neo-conservative worldview demonises Islam and confuses how many see the reality of life in countries such as Iran.

For a lot of people in the West, the mere mention of Iran conjures up images of oppressed women in black chadors and hejabs, silent and subservient in their male dominated culture, existing solely on the margins. This is an idea the US would like to promote as one of its reasons for being critical of the Iranian government. It is also something that should not be used as one of the justifications of any military action.

On 20th March this year, in Cleveland, Ohio, George Bush said that "the threat from Iran is, of course, their stated objective to destroy our strong ally Israel... I made it clear, I'll make it clear again, that we will use military might to protect our ally, Israel". The US is also saying that Iran is developing nuclear technology with a view to making a bomb. In fact, Iran is not in any breach of the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. In this treaty, non-nuclear states (like Iran) agreed not to develop nuclear weapons and in return the nuclear states (like the US) agreed to share civilian nuclear technologies and work towards a treaty on nuclear disarmament.

A US invasion or attack on Iran will drive Iran backwards and into nationalist politics. Instead of resisting the Ayatollah they will have to resist the US.

As an Iranian journalist Elaheh Povey said in March 2006, the "constant threat of sanction, war and regime change from the US and Israel and their supporters in Europe and Britain weakens the women's movement and the democracy movement in Iran. Iranians are proud of their country and are determined to protect its independence".

The history of Iran is one full of political upheavals and contradictions and the history of its women is central to the analysis. In the revolution of 1978-1979, the Shah

was overthrown by a movement of workers, students, ethnic minorities, religious minorities and women. While never achieving any sense of equality and worse, while experiencing many abuses of human rights, women's issues in the 1980s were nonetheless important social and political issues in Iranian society. Issues such as divorce and children affected the economic contributions of all women. Poverty and lack of access to education and employment affected the lives of poor women especially, in both rural and urban areas. Children as young as twelve from these areas, for example, were sent to the front lines.

In the period of the Iran-Iraq war, the



Revolution in Iran in 1979

state re-distributed wealth. The religious and poor supporters of the Islamic state were given priority in employment and education.

As Islamism and support for the Islamic state grew it drove secular movements, workers councils, student groups and women's organizations underground. War with Iraq ended in 1988 and in 1991, with the beginning of the Gulf War, Iran benefited from the rise in oil prices and this led to more imports, increased prosperity for a few and inflation. The number of women with college degrees began to rise and women began to outnumber men in universities. A 2005 UNICEF study showed that 64% of university students were women.

This equal access to education did not however translate into equal rights in the workplace. As in other countries managerial positions were still off limits to women. Even though educated women outnumbered educated men, the rate of unemployment among women was three times higher. It was however the beginnings of great

change for both women and Iranian society as a whole. In 2005 eighty-nine women activists declared themselves as candidates in the presidential election as a protest against the constitution which does not allow women to be presidents of the Islamic state. Women staged sit-ins, occupations and demonstrations.

During the Gulf war, Iran remained neutral and was equally critical of both Iraq's presence in Kuwait and the US presence in the Middle East. In 1993 Bill Clinton came to power in the US and initiated a policy that would see the political isolation of Iran for supposed support of terrorists and for the suspected development of nuclear weapons. Securing World Bank loans in 1994 also meant deregulation and privatization. Inflation and unemployment led to many workers protests until political pressure from workers, students and women's groups forced the government to provide state-funded social services.

One of the most significant years for women was 1992, the year in which the judiciary of the Islamic Republic permitted women to begin practicing law, a right previously denied.

With this a whole movement emerged, of women lawyers, judges, journalists and activists and they began to campaign more vigorously on

human rights issues affecting women. Most famous of these probably is human rights lawyer Shirin Ebadi who won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2003.

She says in her memoir *Iran Awakening* that "the franchise of higher education did not chip away at gender discrimination enshrined in our culture as well as our institutions. But it instilled something in Iranian women that will, in the long run, I believe transform Iran: a visceral consciousness of their oppression".

Shirin boycotted the 2005 elections because women candidates had been rejected. Elaheh Povey argues that the participation of so many women made these elections important and that the women's movement has to address the needs of the poor in order to succeed. These debates are happening because of the social turmoil and demand for change in Iran. The best way we can support the courage and determination of women in Iran to throw off the yoke of oppression is by opposing any intervention or attacks by the US.

By Kieran Allen

Fear of Islam has reached dangerous levels. A recent telephone poll of 1,000 Americans found that 26% agreed that "Muslims teach their children to hate unbelievers" and 29% thought that "Muslims value life less than other people".

The controversy over the cartoons in the Danish paper *Jyllands-Posten* revealed the scale of Islamophobia throughout Europe. The controversy was framed as a battle between the Western defence of free speech and Islamic fanaticism.

But imagine the reaction if the newspaper had asserted its "freedom" to print images that compared Jewish people to rats or Nelson Mandela with the racist stereotype of thick lips and fuzzy hair.

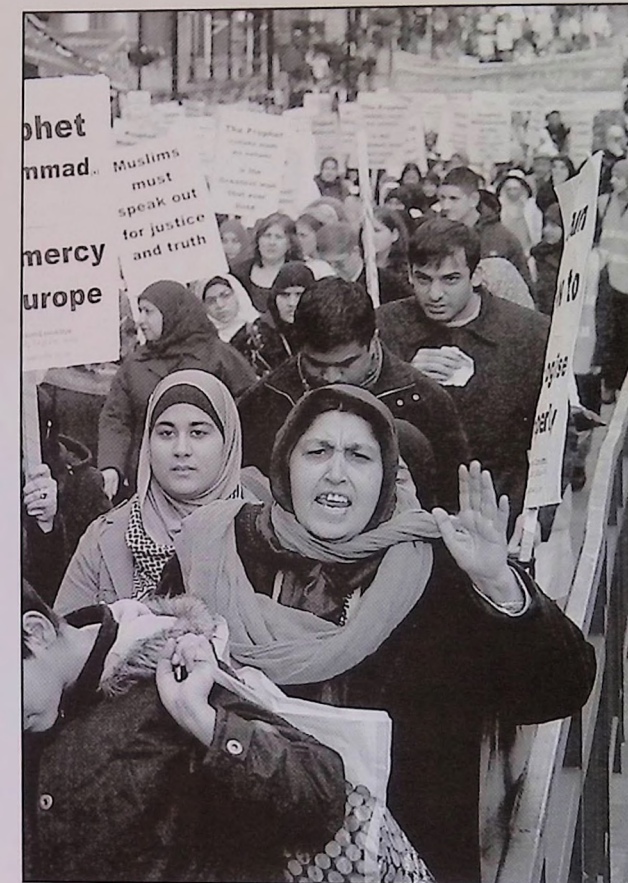
No society grants an absolute right to free speech. No one, for example, defends the right of paedophiles to advocate child abuse. Few people think it is a good idea to deliberately shout "Fire!" in a manner that might cause a stampede among crowds.

The call for "free speech" was, and is, a legitimate demand to create a space where people can express themselves without fear of sanction from authorities. Socialists want more of this "free speech" so that workers in companies like Ryanair, for example, can freely advocate joining unions without fearing the sack. But the call for free speech was never about whipping up a hate speech that can only serve to stimulate violent attacks on minority groups.

And that is precisely what the cartoons were about. Few appeared to notice that the same editor who asserted his right to "free speech" refused to print a cartoon that ridiculed Christ. Nor did his paper criticise the Danish Queen who blatantly stated, "We have to show our opposition to Islam and we have to, at times, run the risk of having unflattering labels placed on us because there are some things to which we should show no tolerance."

Whether it is the debate

Islamophobia: the new racism



Standing up to racism

about Danish cartoons or the ban on wearing the veil in French schools or even Turkey's application to join the EU, a common theme has emerged among Europe's top politicians. The former French Prime Minister Raffarin spelled it out when he asked "Do we want the river of Islam to enter the riverbed of secularism?" The clear implication was that Europe's liberal culture was under threat.

Liberal values have become the new code word under which Islamophobia masks itself. The false claim that Western society is based on tolerance and debate has become a code to proclaim superiority and rationality. The portrayal of colonised people as "fanatical" is equally a code to claim that they are irra-

tional and reliant on feelings rather than intelligence. This dualism is as old as the idea of empire itself.

Despite its own history Ireland, of course, is not immune to these sentiments. The National Consultative Committee on Racism in Ireland has detected a rise in physical assaults and verbal abuse against Ireland's Islamic community, which now totals over 19,000 people. The Islamic Cultural Centre has noted that women appear to be a particular target of these attacks. In Northern Ireland, racist attacks per head of the population now exceed those for the UK and Muslims have been frequently targeted. In Craigavon there have been vocal objections to building a mosque because,

according to the former Ulster Unionist Party mayor, "Muslims are out to wipe out Christianity"

Islamophobia has grown after September 11th. One factor has been the continual linking of the term Islamic with "fundamentalist" or even "terrorist". During the thirty-year conflict in Northern Ireland, it was rare to hear the coupling of "Catholic" and "terrorist" but reports of the Iraqi conflict rarely omit to prefix "terrorist" with the adjective "Islamic".

The Runnymede Trust in Britain has identified a number of components to Islamophobia. These include a belief that Islam is one homogenous belief system that has no shared values with the West. It is further defined as barbaric, irrational, violent and sexist in contrast to a civilised, rational, peaceful Western culture that upholds women's rights. Islam is also portrayed as a political ideology that seeks conquest.

Much of this is based on ignorance about the beliefs system and traditions of Islam.

Take, for instance, the statement of the former German chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, who claimed that Turkey did not belong to the EU because "the decisive and essential developments that formed European culture—the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and the separation of clerical and political authority—are missing from the Islamic tradition".

For its sheer ignorance, this is breathtaking. The European Renaissance arose because of the injection of Ancient Greek learning into a Church-dominated Europe. When Europe was in its dark ages, Arabic scholars rescued the genius of ancient Greek texts from oblivion. Intellectuals in Europe learnt about "their" Greek heritage through contact with the Islamic world in southern Spain. Without this cultural hybridity, there would have been no Renaissance and Enlightenment.

Helmut Schmidt's point about the separation of clerical and political authority is also a distortion. No such separation

existed in many European countries in the past—consider only the “special position” of the Catholic Church in Ireland or in Franco’s Spain or in Salazar’s Portugal.

The early Islamic ideal certainly sought to build a religious and political community—the ummah—where there was a fair distribution of wealth. But like all religions, there was a huge contradiction between these ideals and the creation of Islamic empires that established dynastic monarchies. Splits and sects developed within Islam, precisely because the political community did not correspond to the religious ideal. Muslims, therefore, learnt to create religious communities outside the dominant political framework—because they had to.

Today Islam has become the second biggest religion in Britain and France. According to the Muslim intellectual, Tariq Ramadan—who has been banned from the USA—they are developing a specific “European Muslim culture”. Their biggest obstacle, however, is racist attitudes, which suggest that in order to be European, one must be less Muslim.

This rests on a myth that Islam is a particularly intolerant, violent religion compared to Christianity. However, history does not bear this out.

Muslim empires did not force Christian subjects to convert. They often defined Jews and Christians as “dhimmis” (protected subjects) who could not be raided or attacked. Karen Armstrong, in her impressive history of Islam, points out that the Ottoman empire “provided a framework which enabled different groups—Christians, Jews, Arabs, Turks, Berbers ... to live together peacefully, each making its own contribution, and following its own beliefs”. Not perfect by any means but probably a good deal more tolerant than Catholic Spain!

Many Islamophobic outbursts focus on Muslim women who wear the hijab. It is assumed that they wear the veil only because they are forced to by their male elders. Their visible display of “servitude” is then taken as an insult to Western feminist values.

However, if the talk about women’s rights in the West matched the actual practice, inequality in wages, career prospects and domestic violence would have ended long ago. The biggest threat to women’s rights in the West probably comes from the

Christian fundamentalist George Bush who has cut funding to family planning services because they provide women with information on abortion.

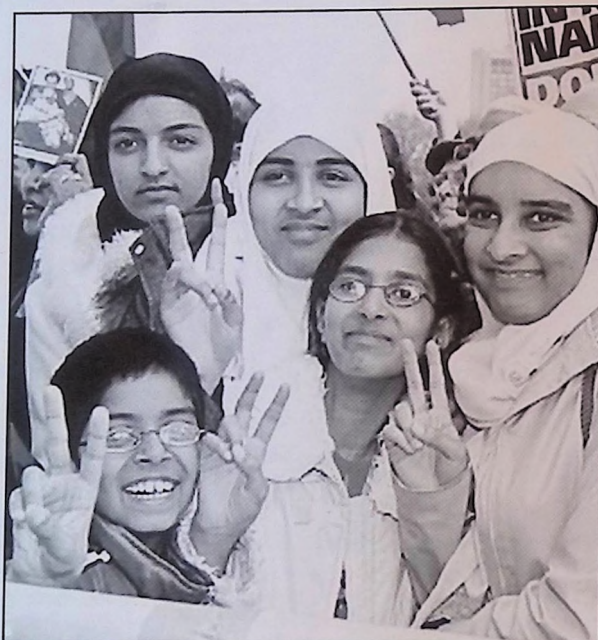
The issue of why people adopt particular symbols to assert their identity is highly complex. However, a study by two French sociologists, Gaspard and Khosrokhavar, challenges the stereotypes about Muslim women.

They stated that “We met a good many young women wearing the veil who seemed to us closer to modern attitudes than some adults and young women not wearing the veil. A good many of them object to polygamy, to not being allowed to work outside the home, to inequality of rights in certain areas... There is no question of them staying at home nor accepting an arranged marriage. Even with their hair covered, their movements follow

been one of systematic humiliation by empires and the denial of democracy because of a brutal friendship between Western governments and tyrannical Arab regimes.

Islamic activism originally arose in opposition to colonial rule. In 1882, for example, when British troops occupied Egypt, the first Islamists set out to rally opposition to the occupation. One of the key figures was the Iranian cleric Jamel al-Din Afghani who argued that as people of the Middle East had a common religion they could act together as Muslims to overthrow the colonial yoke. The Muslim Brotherhood grew as secular nationalists made their peace with the empire. In the 1920s, for example, it expanded dramatically as the secular party the Wafd ran a phoney independent government that was a front for the British.

In more recent times,



Many Islamophobic outbursts focus on Muslim women who wear the hijab

the body sensitivity of French society, not that of traditional Islamic society”.

There is nothing in Islam that makes it more prone to “fundamentalism” than any of the other world religions. The famous Scopes “Monkey Trial” in Tennessee in 1925, when Darwin’s theory of evolution was banned from public schools, testifies to this.

Fundamentalism arises from the political, social and economic conditions under which people live rather than from the sacred texts or traditions of any religion. The experience of many Arab people has

Islamic activism has grown as left nationalists made their peace with imperialism. Hamas has become the majority force in Palestine precisely because the PLO co-operated with Israel and accepted US rule. In Algeria, the FIS grew because the secular nationalists that originally fought the French settled into a life of corruption and graft.

The more societies are ground down by imperialism, the more sections within them look to earlier traditions, which become a badge of resistance and revolt. The process is by no means automatic and if the left was determined to spearhead a

fight against imperialism, it could offer an alternative. But where the left is non-existent or worse where it has failed, revolts can sometimes take the form of harking back to tradition.

The first revolt against British rule in India in 1847 started in the army as soldiers mutinied because they were ordered to clean their guns with animal fat. The Western socialist who sneered at this as “backward” revolt in the name of their own liberal secularism merely hid their pandering to empire.

In a similar manner, socialists should not be neutral in a conflict between the US and the people it demonised as Islamic fundamentalists—for two good reasons.

First, the more US imperialism is bogged down in a war in Iraq, the less able it is to impose its will in other parts of the world. If the dreams of the neocons had come true and Iraq was now ruled by a residual force of 30,000 US troops, it would be far freer to depose the Chavez government in Venezuela or the Morales government in Bolivia. The Islamic resistance in Iraq has created a breathing space for all who want to resist empire.

Second, the rich strengthen their ideological hold when they convince European workers that they too are part of a ruling community defined by Western values.

There is, of course, nothing particularly tolerant about a continent that gave us the Holocaust and two world wars. Yet the more the media convinces workers these so-called cultural values are under attack from poor “fanatical” people, the more they are locked into the system of corporate capitalism.

Socialists do not give cover to any religious movement when it is engaged in oppression. We support the students and workers of Iran when they come into conflict with clerical rulers. We are opposed to repression of gays whether it is Catholic Ireland or Islamic Saudi Arabia.

But in a world that is being shaped by Bush’s “war on terror” and the associated targeting of Islamic people, we first make it clear that we are on the side of people who resist imperialism. It is only by so doing that wider socialist critiques have any chance of gaining a hearing among the many millions who are being demonised by the Bush regime.

IRELAND AND THE NEOLIBERAL AGENDA:

Crisis in the Health Service



Nursing staff struggle to cope with under-resourcing

By Fiona Boyd

The current Irish health crisis is condemning thousands of patients, on top of their illnesses, to intolerable hardship and poor quality care. Yet it is an orchestrated crisis. Politicians and business interests have combined to strip the Irish health system of its ability and duty to provide excellent care to the people of Ireland. They have forced patients to seek alternative treatments in the private sector.

Bed closures, the A&E trolley crisis, staff shortages, under-resourcing, poor working conditions and waiting lists—all these are directly or indirectly a result of the imposition of a neoliberal agenda in Ireland that seeks to fully privatise the health system.

The human toll of underfunding and privatisation of the health service is intolerable for all Irish citizens, but it is even worse for the vulnerable members of society such as the elderly, the disabled, the long-term ill and the poor. Evidence from the privatised health system in the US shows the danger of going further down that path.

The 2002 Finance Act gave tax-breaks for the first time to build for-profit hospitals in Ireland. The first for-profit hospital, the 100-bed Galway clinic, backed by beef baron Larry Goodman opened in September 2005 at a cost of €40 million to the tax-payer while the local University College Hospital is starved of beds. The 180-

bed Beacon Clinic in Sandford in Dublin will open in August and will be run by the American multinational Triad. Triad is a spin-off of Columbia/HCA which has paid out \$1.6 billion in fines for health-care fraud in the US.

Health care in America is big business. It is the most expensive and technologically advanced health care system in the world yet it fails to provide quality care for the 50 million people who are unable to afford insurance.

This sizeable minority, 16% of the population, is mainly composed of the working poor who must pay for their care or go to public emergency departments. This inequitable system is allowed to go on because of the effective lobbying of the estimated 500 private “for-profit” health corporations.

American health care is funded, like Ireland, by a hybrid system that combines tax funding with private health insurance. The state pays for less than half of health care; the rest is made up by individuals and companies in private fees or by private health insurance. 15% of America’s national income is spent on health, with 40% going towards Medicaid which finances care for the poor. However, this only serves 40% of those below the poverty line.

Employer-provided medical benefit schemes, or hugely expensive private health insurance schemes cover the remainder of the population. But as some employers do not provide any schemes

and many cannot afford to insure themselves, a significant number have no cover at all.

Furthermore, access to care and the type of treatment received depends on the schemes provided by the various profit-motivated insurance schemes and state provision, such as Medicare (healthcare for the elderly).

As a result, many are only able to avail of particular types of treatment, drugs and care which may not be adequate.

And the outcome of such a system? The overwhelming evidence shows that government-purchased medical services provided by for-profit hospitals are more costly than non-profit hospitals. Out of 149 cases, 88 non-profit centres performed better, while in 43 cases there was no difference.

Furthermore, the quality of care is better in the American non-profit system, and researchers conclude that for-profit care leads to higher mortality rates.

Having saturated the American market, healthcare corporations are now looking for new investment opportunities. English politicians are facilitating for-profit healthcare development in their own NHS system.

The NHS was designed to provide free universal and comprehensive health care for all the citizens equally on the basis of need. Yet, since Thatcher's time in the 80's, the enactment of no less than 30 parliamentary acts has meticulously undermined its public provision. Ironically, this has been done in the name of "cost-efficiency".

What began as the outsourcing of non-clinical services and the introduction of hospital managers with business principles has led, through the introduction of quasi-markets, to a third of the newly established trusts facing serious financial difficulty. They are forced into mergers and closures.

1991 saw the establishment of Private Finance Initiatives or PFI's.

This is where a consortium of bankers, construction companies and facilities management firms come together in a joint venture to design, build and operate NHS premises in return for an annual charge paid by the NHS over the lifetime of a contract, usually 25-30 years. By 2005, the total value of PFI-financed hospital schemes approved by government amounted to £16 billion.

The result has been that vital services and precious NHS resources are being handed over to the private sector with £12 billion, or 15% of the NHS budget, being spent on propping up the market. Beds, wards and whole hospitals have been closed down and nurses, medical professionals and health workers are finding themselves unemployed, as jobs are axed. All in the name of profit.

What is happening to the health care system in Ireland is similar to the process undergone in England except that Ireland's health service is in a more advanced state of privatisation. Despite the much-heralded success story of the Celtic Tiger, Ireland's economic policies have actually led to a widening chasm between the haves and the have nots in Irish society. Ireland ranks 6th highest in child poverty rates in comparison to 23 industrialised countries of the OECD.

All this has been brought about by pro-foreign investment policies and a favourable tax regime for the wealthy. Reduced taxation income results in reduced public expenditure.

The government thus provides under-resourced and inadequate public goods and services such as health, education and transport. Its effects are that the poor and vulnerable have to con-

tend with both low income and poor public services.

This imposed economic and political framework leads to health crises and is the outcome of a neoliberal agenda that welcomes investment and privatisation of public services.

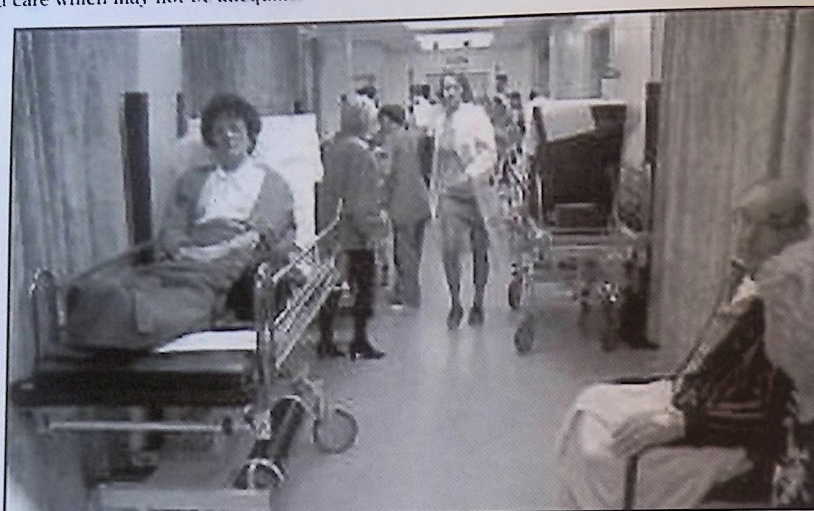
This agenda continues to be promoted by Irish neoliberals—the Fianna Fáil Government and the official opposition—irrespective of the mounting evidence that highlights its economic inefficiency and the huge human cost.

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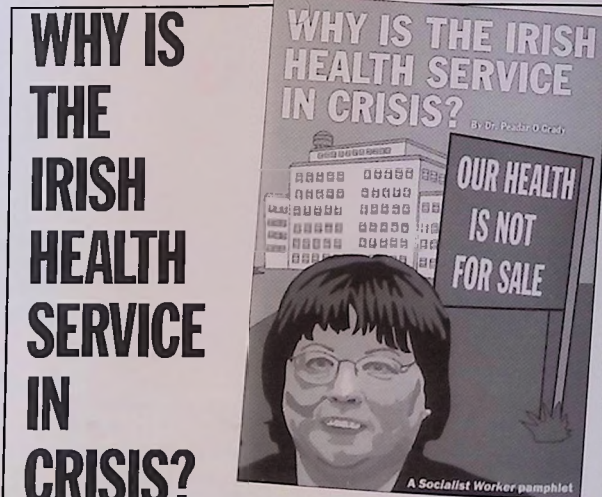
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Useful websites:

www.People-before-profit.org (Health Action Group: People before Profit Alliance)
www.keepournhspublic.com (Keep our NHS Public campaign in UK)
www.chsrf.ca (Canadian Health Services Research Foundation)



Patients waiting on trolleys and chairs



by Dr Peadar O'Grady

"How can it be that, despite such unbelievable wealth, we have a health service that is now worse than it was in the 1980s when the country was in the depths of recession and threatened with bankruptcy?"

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"Drug companies are now the most profitable of all companies in the world. Even banks and oil companies are less profitable."

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Where did neoliberalism come from?

In Ireland the term neoliberalism is only beginning to be used. Its origins show how and why it has become the new orthodoxy of global capitalism.

The economic crises of the 1970's, characterised by high inflation, high unemployment and low growth rates, sparked widespread social discontent from union and social movements. Their demands posed a clear political threat to economic elites and ruling classes everywhere. Capitalists also found that their profits were falling behind the high levels of the post-war boom. The oil crises of 1973 brought things to a head and ruling classes sought re-establish their power by embracing neoliberal economics.

The central tenet of neoliberalism is the belief that the market mechanism should be allowed to direct the fate of human beings in every sphere. It advocates complete freedom of investment, freedom of capital flows and freedom of trade from state regulation. In theory, government intervention should be restricted to guaranteeing the value and quality of money, and providing legal and military structures for the defence of private property rights and the functioning of the market.

This represented a reversal of Keynesian liberal economics and its advocacy of state regulation of essential services and the curtailing of rampant inequalities. The heyday of Keynesianism saw the establishment of free education, public health and welfare as a bulwark against the social risks of old age, death of a supporting spouse, invalidity, sickness and maternity.

The move against this approach was led by Reagan and Thatcher and their corporate allies in the 1980's. A new economic order deregulated the market and opened the way for the fluid and flexible transfer of capital across the globe. The transfer of public monies to private hands, the introduction of low tax regimes for corporations, private investment inducements, "freeing up" of the labour market through cutting back on workers' rights and the creation of favourable conditions for the transfer of capital between nations, were some of the results of this policy.

These market measures also involved new roles for the mass media and information technologies in the productive process. This in turn has led to the reorganisation of labour based around the principles of efficiency and cost-effectiveness and an open embracing of individualism at all levels. Privatisation of state services both



Water wars in Cochabamba

supported this individualism and provided new profit-making opportunities for private corporations. It amounted to what Harvey, author of A Brief History of Neoliberalism, calls "accumulation by dispossession", the theft of a whole range of social support systems by the multinationals.

The success of neoliberalism would not have been possible without the creation of a "golden circle" of influential bodies which provided a brutally effective international network. Foundations and institutes such as The American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation, research centres, publications, writers and the proliferation of various think-tanks helped to pave the way for neoliberal thinking. Crucially, the IMF, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation, in return for the granting of loans to indebted countries, imposed rigorous neoliberal policies which resulted in a slashing of public services

and the institution of trade agreements preferential to the US.

Neoliberalism takes for granted that market economics benefit everyone, that "a rising tide raises all boats". The evidence states otherwise. Research demonstrates that the gap between rich and poor nations increased from 44:1 in 1973 to 72:1 by 2000.

The rate of debt for developing countries has increased by a factor of eight, and per capita income has declined in 50 countries between 1990 and 1998. In other words, the already wide gap between the developed and undeveloped world has increased. While the top 1% of American families increased their income by 50%, the bottom 10% reduced their income by 15%. In England, whereas in pre-Thatcherite times 1 in 10 was classed as living below the poverty line, today it is 1 in 4. All of these inequalities are a direct result of neoliberal globalisation.

Thus neoliberalism, far from being a kind of natural development of the powers of the market, has in fact been a conscious political project. It has come about through particular agents, in particular places, and situated in particular power relationships with the specific aim of tipping the balance back towards corporate power. Its aim has been to attack the limited gains that workers won in the 60's and 70's and erode an array of social rights that were previously taken for granted.

Neoliberalism however contains many contradictions. It does not actually deliver the harmonious world that it advocates and its rule has presided over market crashes, grinding poverty, extensive corporate corruption, and war. Its dictates have triggered a reaction of world-wide proportions. The Zapatistas in Mexico, the MST in Brazil, the wave of popular movements in Venezuela and Bolivia, anti-capitalist protests and the rejection of the EU constitution in France, all these struggles are part of the same movement. Struggles against Celtic Tiger neoliberalism—particularly Irish Ferries which highlighted displacement of labour caused by global competition—have shown some of the same spontaneous solidarity.

The fight against the neoliberal agenda—what the people of Venezuela call the "fourth world war"—amounts to a cultural and political revolution which is challenging the rule of the market and the exploitative relations of global capitalism.

Politics and the movement: France 2006

Nick Barret is on the national leadership of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, one of the key 'left of left' political parties in France. The LCR, as this article shows, was at the forefront of the strikes and occupations against the CPE (First Employment Contract).

The great victory of the university and high school student movement against the French Tory government's youth employment scheme has sent political shockwaves through France.

Before describing the struggle itself and the political fallout, it is worth emphasizing the context. In the last three years workers have suffered several major defeats. The strike movement against the pension reforms in 2003 lost after a hard two months struggle. Attacks on the health service went through virtually without resistance, and the electricity workers lost in their fight to prevent privatisation. Locally, hard struggles such as the SNCM (Corsican car ferries) strike against privatisation or the local transport workers in Marseille were isolated and also lost. The one bright spot was the political victory in the referendum on the European Constitution on May 29th 2005, but it was just at the ballot box, and there was no immediate upturn in struggle following it.

The mass revolt of youth in the suburbs (the "banlieues") in the autumn of 2005, described by the secret services as an "urban uprising", did shake French society. But on the whole, one could have been forgiven for thinking that the series of workers' defeats was beginning to take its toll. Thus, in January, a confident Minister de Villepin announced a new contract (the "CPE") for young people which basically would have meant that people could be sacked at any time during the first two years of the contract without employers having to justify their position.

The resistance started in the militant Rennes university in Brittany, and, thanks to the hard work of core activists, combined with the total disdain of the de Villepin government concerning the students' demands, it rapidly spread to a majority of French universities. The characteristics of the movement were mass meetings on the campuses (for example at Poitiers university the students met in a sports stadium, the only place big enough to hold several thousand people), occupations lasting weeks, a deep attachment to democracy (the occupations and the pickets were systematically voted) and direct action blocking roads and railways and opening motorway toll stations.

After two and a half months of struggle the mass movement of students and high school students, supported by workers, forced the French government to abandon the CPE. On May 10th the Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin announced the withdrawal of the scheme in what was a crushing defeat for the right.

He had practically no choice. Despite

the government's attempts to divide and repress, the mobilisation on the streets had gone from strength to strength. It widened the split between de Villepin and Justice Minister Sarkozy, rivals for next year's presidential elections, with Sarkozy trying to put himself across as the politician ready to compromise over the CPE. Even former president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (architect of the neoliberal European Constitution project defeated in last year's referendum) called for the withdrawal of the scheme. The bosses, more worried about their immediate profits, faced with the student pickets of rail and road transports, and about the danger of the development of a mass strike movement amongst workers, also advised Chirac and de Villepin to back down.

The student organisations and the unions are the winners. It is a victory for mass mobilisation and grassroots organisation. A national student coordinating committee led the movement, built up on a system of delegates elected university by university, school by school, meeting every weekend to decide on the way to build the movement and carry it forward. This was a key factor in pushing the union leadership into building the massive demonstrations. Such was the distrust of the mass media, journalists were barred from the coordination's debates and had to wait for the end of the weekend long meetings to receive the official collective position of the students.

The main student union, UNEF, also comes out of the battle with a fighting image and although often outflanked on the ground by the coordinating committee, their spokesperson, Bruno Julliard, has become a national figure.

The unions opposed the CPE from the start. As a direct attack on workers' basic rights no union could back down. Being able to sack someone without legal justification during a two year period was also a direct threat to the future trade union bases in the workplace. The memory of the CFDT's (one of the major unions) betrayal of the 2003 strike was also in the minds of demonstrators. The government and de Villepin's hard line position did the rest. Their refusal to negotiate meant that only the withdrawal of the CPE was acceptable.

The withdrawal of the CPE follows the referendum victory against the European Constitution last year and has left the government groggy. For the next few months it is on thin ice, the slightest neoliberal counter reform could spark off a reaction in one sector or another. Prime Minister de Villepin has become a liability for the right but to prevent a defeat turning into a rout he has been kept on. But if Chirac could find

somebody else to do the job he would probably replace him.

But this is not the end of the story.

A major corruption scandal around the Luxemburg clearing bank Clearstream has broken out. Apparently, de Villepin tried to use the scandal to discredit his major opponent Interior Minister Sarkozy, and a series of sordid revelations around former secret service personnel link the major arms manufacturers, notably around the sale of frigates to Taiwan at the beginning of the 1990s, with leading political figures. This comes together with allegations of laundering money and tax evasion.

The way de Villepin and Chirac have handled the affair has split the right and exposed a rampant corruption inside the French state and a complete disregard for democracy. In some ways it is similar to the Stavinsky scandal in 1934 which sparked off political radicalisation leading first to an attempted fascist coup, followed by mass workers demonstrations, leading to the election of a left wing government and a general strike two years later.

After the revolt of young people in the suburbs in the autumn which directly challenged state authority, and the victory over the CPE, today's crisis is now touching the very institutions of the French state, completely tied into the presidential system of the 5th Republic. Both president Chirac and Prime Minister de Villepin have only 25-30% support in opinion polls.

Sarkozy distances himself from de Villepin and is in a stronger position. He is now the undisputed leader of a French right which is breaking from traditional Gaullism which paid at least lip service to the idea of a Welfare state, to fully embrace neoliberal politics more typical of the American republicans combined with a strong repressive state. His bill on immigration is a terrible attack on basic democratic rights and will make tens of thousands of people illegal immigrants if it becomes law.

There is also a real danger in such a situation that the far right and the Front National could make considerable gains in next year's presidential and general elections.

But it is the left which has come out strongest from the movement.

First, the Socialist Party is trying to present itself as the rampart against Sarkozy. The media are hyping Ségolène Royal, a declared Blairite, as the most likely Socialist Party candidate in the presidential elections and polls suggest she could beat Sarkozy. Many commentators are predicting a duel between Sarkozy and Ségolène Royal next year, and the SP is counting on an anti-Sarkozy vote to win. However, in a



French school students and youth protest at the CPE

Libération opinion poll most people didn't see much difference between the Socialist party programme and that of the right.

Further left, the victory over the youth employment scheme has reinforced the anti-neoliberal politics. In the space of a year, first around the referendum, and now on the streets in mass demonstrations and pickets, the movement has inflicted two major defeats on the government. The national caucus of the hundreds of "No" committees still operating met in May this year and approved a left anti-neoliberal manifesto which they are going to popularize. Secondly, a national committee of left-wingers, many involved in the referendum campaign has issued a call on the 10th of May for a united left anti-neoliberal slate at next year's elections.

Support committees are already being formed. The appeal states that the social-liberal politics of the SP leadership are not a solution, that in the long run a two party system typified by Sarkozy-Royal would be a disaster and undertakes not to participate in a social-liberal dominated government. This call may be the first concrete step in shifting the dividing lines on the French left with the emergence of a new anti-neoliberal left coalition.

Very significantly, Marie-George Buffet's Communist Party has signed it, but the party is still caught between its traditional alliance with the Socialist Party to keep its deputies and the hopes of its members and supporters who want a more radical change. Left wingers of the SP have also signed and the leadership has threatened to expel them.

But it is the party which best responded

to the movement, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) which could play the vital role. Its spokesperson, Olivier Besancenot, has gained consistently in popularity, is a national figure, and polls put him systematically ahead of the communist Marie-George Buffet for the presidential elections, a nightmare for the CP leadership. However, the majority of the LCR leadership is cautious about engaging in the united left campaign, pointing out that the Communist Party will probably end up supporting or taking part in government with the SP.

This can be a very dangerous argument. It is indeed unlikely that the CP party apparatus would break of its own design with the SP; quite simply its survival is totally dependent on keeping its MPs and regional and municipal councillors in place thanks to election agreements with the SP. However, the absence of the LCR from such a united left anti-neoliberal coalition could paradoxically make it easier for the CP to do precisely that.

The result would be to tie the anti-neoliberal left to the SP strategy, with the inevitable consequence of a Sarkozy-SP duel in 2007. The danger with this is twofold. Firstly the radicalisation of the left would be dispersed and demoralized. Secondly the real popular anger and frustration could, in part, be channelled by the far right and the National Front, possibly with as big a vote as in 2002.

The stakes are thus very high. In the space of a year there has been a real turnaround, both in struggle and in political debate. Amongst the new generation, the development of political consciousness

which started in the anti-Le Pen demonstrations in 2002, continued for some through the antiwar movement and then in the school students' struggle in 2005, has made enormous progress.

No-one would dare predict what will happen over the next few months in terms of struggle, but one thing is sure—it will be the combination of politics and student and worker grass-roots organisation and activity which is the best way to go forward.

Workers did not strike massively this time round, but the confidence coming from this first victory will be crucial in the future. But whilst it is clearly the level of struggle which in the long run will be decisive, it may well be that the key element in going forward today is the emergence of an anti-neoliberal left, breaking on a mass scale with the strategy of the SP and giving hope to millions who want political change. This is now a real possibility. Many people can no longer stomach the idea of another plural left socialist dominated government and want something new.

Millions have marched on the streets, many are looking for an alternative to liberal politics and tens of thousands of young people have organized the biggest youth movement since 1968. In such a situation what the LCR does could play a crucial role in the future of left politics.

There is a historic opportunity for us to play a leading role in the emergence of a new anti-neoliberal left which could act as a fighting pole of political attraction for many, whether they be in the CP, on the left of the SP, in the unions, or simply part of the thousands who, up until now, have held back from organized politics.

GERMANY AND THE NEW LEFT PARTY:

United we stand



German socialists take to the streets

By Christine Buchholz, member of the Executive of Wahlalternative Arbeit & Soziale Gerechtigkeit (WASG)

Over the next year, there will be a new left in Germany. This was the good news from the recent party conferences of WASG (Election Alternative for Work and Social Justice).

WASG is a brand new party which counts in its ranks Oskar Lafontaine and the Linkspartei/PDS. Oskar Lafontaine is a former SPD-dissident and renowned for his anti-neoliberal stand. The Linkspartei was formerly the PDS, the mainly East German Communist party which emerged after the 1989 revolution.

The WASG has sprung from the mass movements against social cuts under Schroeder's SPD (Labourite) government.

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It had its first success in winning an impressive 54 seats in the German Bundestag—the federal government. The WASG party represents the one and only opposition to neoliberalism on the German political map.

As such, it offers hope to many people who have been disillusioned by the politics of the established parties, particularly to those from within the social demo-

A challenge is to overcome sectarianism. Splits and divisions have long been around on the left in Germany and these habits die hard.

cratic camp and the trade union movement.

WASG decided in two referendums of its members to form a new party together with the Linkspartei/PDS.

They decided that a common steering committee should organise the process of building a new party with a new programme and statutes and that the different strands of the party should not stand against each other in elections.

The bringing together of a wide range of people—former social democrats and communists and activists from the social movements—presents a whole number of challenges.

One is the fact that Linkspartei/PDS is part of some local and regional governments and is, as a result, participating in privatisation and redundancy programmes.

This represents a serious problem.

because it weakens the credibility of the left and resistance, even though the Linkspartei/PDS argues that its presence means that there will be less privatisation and fewer redundancies.

Oskar Lafontaine has made it clear that the new left has to be unequivocal in opposing the sell-off of public services, further deregulation and war.

The second challenge is to overcome sectarianism. Splits and divisions have long been around on the left in Germany and these habits die hard.

The Berlin WASG decided to stand in the elections against the Linkspartei/PDS despite the national organisation having agreed to cooperate on a national level.

They argue that they cannot support the neoliberal policies of the Berlin Linkspartei/PDS.

Their position plays directly into the hands of the political right and the bourgeois press who are now giving huge coverage to the number one candidate of the WASG Berlin—Lucy Redler, a young Trotskyist—for standing against the Linkspartei.

The new left now has to do two things: it has to face down separatism and fragmentation and build a broad political alliance and, at the same time, fight for clear anti-neoliberal politics.

Its task is to win over the millions that are disillusioned with the SPD after its broken promises in the former red-green coalition and now with its shameful participation in the Grand Coalition government.

The new party of the left has already started to provide a fighting alternative in the election campaign, in the campaign against the Bolkestein Directive, in the struggles against further cuts, the war and also the fight against the neo-nazis.

We supported the massive public sector strikes against the employers offensive to up the working week from 38.5 to 40 hours, which involved hundreds and thousands of workers in the Verdi union and which lasted several weeks. We have also agreed to jointly protest against the G8 summit that will take place in Germany in 2007.

One clear gain of cooperation is that the national conference of Linkspartei/PDS voted against the selling of public housing in the city of Dresden. 7 Linkspartei councilors in Dresden had previously voted in favour of the sell-off but have now broken ranks with the official Dresden Linkspartei/PDS.

The task ahead of us is huge. The Grand Coalition is planning severe attacks on the welfare state, further deregulation and downsizing. Conservative Prime Minister Angela Merkel already indicated to George W. Bush that she will support his "war on terror".

With these challenges ahead, the opportunity of building real resistance to neoliberal politics and providing a credible alternative on the left, is within our grasp.

Events in Berlin have taken a different tack

The leadership of WASG Berlin attempted to present their own candidate to run against the Linkspartei PDS.

Support for a candidate running against the Linkspartei PDS was weak.

In a local referendum, out of the 850 members of the WASG in Berlin, 272 voted for their proposal and 245 against.

Other members, who are also candidates of the list of WASG, are now openly questioning the sectarianism of the Berlin leadership.

At a recent meeting of the national executive of WASG, it was finally decided to suspend the local executive of Berlin WASG.

The national conference of the WASG had already ruled out a candidate running against the Linkspartei PDS in Berlin.

Splitting the left even before it had come together makes absolutely no sense.

At the same meeting, it was also decided to put pressure on the Linkspartei PDS in Berlin to cooperate with those members of WASG in Berlin who are willing to build a united left and run joint candidates.

The basis of unity would be a clear "no" to further privatisation and support for agreed positions.

It is important to explain why having unity candidates is so important.

Standing against the Linkspartei PDS would weaken the process of building a new pluralist left force.

In the case of Berlin, with the help of Lafontaine and others, a document on the future politics of the left in Berlin and a common election campaign was



agreed.

It included the demand to stop further privatisation, the recomunalisation (de-privatisation) of water, an €18 public transport ticket for those on benefits and no to university fees.

It also contained agreement to fight for a single school system. Germany has one of the most backward school systems in Europe giving children from poor families and migrants few chances to get a good start in life.

This plan was agreed at a local party conference of Berlin Linkspartei PDS.

Uniting in practice and in struggle with the Linkspartei PDS opens up the possibility of having political arguments in a context in which real questions of strategy and tactics and how to take the struggles forward, are what decides things.

Unity is also important for another reason.

The conservatives are

trying to win votes by blaming immigrants for social problems. Splitting the left, will strengthen the racists and allow them to grow.

It is only by working together that the Linkspartei PDS will come under pressure to change, especially where their "pragmatic" (ie pro-government) wing is strong.

As part of building a new party, a whole range of debates on how to change the world, about the nature of government, etc come to the fore.

We need to have these debates with the members of the Linkspartei and try to influence them.

Unfortunately some sections of the Berlin WASG, in their bid for separation, were trying to avoid these arguments.

Separating off would have both weakened the project of building a new party and also have let the Linkspartei PDS off the hook, by taking the pressure off them.

More seriously, it ran the risk of splitting the WASG nationally, as the separate wing in Berlin WASG were hoping to seek support for their candidates from other cities.

We need a broad party which includes former social democrats, trade unionists, socialists and revolutionaries united on a programme against neoliberalism and war and not a small "pure" party of the radical left.

What has happened in Berlin shows that while the Berlin WASG sees itself as representing the "true left", its actions in fact only serve to isolate and weaken the left overall.

—Christine Buchholz

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Immigrant Rights Movement rocks the US establishment

By Pat O'Sullivan

In the biggest demonstrations in US history, millions of workers struck on Mayday, in order to show their bosses what a "un día sin inmigrantes"—a day without immigrants—would be like. It was a massive show of strength for the estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. and their supporters.

In 153 cities across 39 states—and across the border, in Mexico and other Latin American countries—millions of people turned out to demand justice for immigrants.

The numbers were truly staggering: 600,000 in Chicago (the birthplace of Mayday 120 years ago); over a million at two separate demonstrations in Los Angeles; 100,000 in Atlanta; 100,000 in San Francisco; half a million in New York City; tens of thousands more in other cities—Seattle, Portland, Sacramento, Houston and Austin, Denver, Providence.

In many cities, students joined in full force, with teach-ins and walkouts at high school and college campuses nationwide.

The turnout was all the more impressive considering that leaders of some immigrant rights organizations (including sadly, the Irish coalition) rejected the call for a boycott.

The protests were a response to new proposed legislation initiated by Republican Senator Sensenbrenner. This could limit immigration and prevent many of those already in the US from becoming citizens. "Illegal" immigrants could also be jailed.

The call for protests originated with grassroots activists in Los Angeles. The action was built through the internet, media catering to an immigrant audience, and through networks of union activists and various rights groups.

The unions provided much of the infrastructure for the demos, and it was amazing to watch Sky TV footage of so many thousand workers marching proudly behind their union banners and placards!

Democratic Party politicians initially urged workers not to support the demonstrations. Further divisions in the leadership of some groups in the immi-

INTERNATIONAL SPOTLIGHT



Millions joined the protests

grant rights movement were highlighted by the dual demonstrations called in Los Angeles—one to celebrate the boycott and amnesty, and the other, set for after work hours, focused on more moderate demands like the "path to citizenship" in the Senate's "compromise."

But as the momentum around the May 1st call built, some of those opposed to the boycott retreated. In California, for example, the state senate approved a resolution supporting the May 1 boycott!

Even threats of repression—raids were carried out by the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement in April, which rounded up nearly 1,200 undocumented workers in a single day—couldn't keep people from marching.

In the days prior to May 1, thousands of immigrant workers across the country stayed home from work, due to rumors of random immigration sweeps. In Florida's Dade County, nearly one-third of farm workers didn't go to work in the week before the protest. However, activist networks succeeded in maintaining confidence in the movement.

In various cities, officials were eventually forced to issue public promises that immigration authorities would not be allowed to detain rally attendees.

Instead of giving in to the threats, immigrants showed their power—spurred to action by a drive for dignity, justice and respect.

As one sign in Chicago read, referring to the legislation that sparked this new movement: "Thank you Rep. Sensenbrenner, you woke up the lion!"

The protests represented a brilliant shot in the arm for progressive activists in the US who have seen alarming attacks on civil liberties, working conditions and, of course, war in the Middle East over the last few years.

Combined with the huge anti war demonstrations the same weekend, they point the way towards a genuine resistance to the neo-conservative stranglehold on American politics.

The demonstrations highlighted the need to look to the self activity of genuine grass roots organizations rather than to the Democratic Party.

The right wing of the Republican Party wants to crimi-

nalise all "illegal" immigrants in the US. However, the issue is a complex one for US bosses, because many industries, especially in the Southern states of the US, are highly dependent on immigrant labour. Leading Democrats have proposed a "compromise" (the Hagel-Martinez bill) and this proposal has received tentative backing from George Bush.

Under Hagel-Martinez, undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. for more than five years could apply to become citizens after six years, paying fines, any back taxes, and learning English.

Those in the U.S. more than two years but less than five could apply for status as guest workers, but only after exiting and re-entering the U.S. at a port of entry—a possible setup for instant deportations.

The rest of the undocumented immigrants—more than 2 million people who have come to the U.S. in the last two years—would be forced to leave and could only apply to return under the guest-worker program.

How the movement responds to this attempt at "divide and rule" will be crucial to the success of the campaign. Democratic Party politicians and other opportunists have been racing to attempt to put themselves at the head of the movement, and are giving Hagel-Martinez their support.

Nativo López, president of the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) and a key organizer of mass marches in Los Angeles on March 25th and May 1st, called the proposals "nothing less than a categorization of the immigrant workforce into a bantu apartheid system"—akin to the old racist system in South Africa.

"Immigrant workers will languish in those categories for years with no absolute guarantee of legal status", he said

The alternative strategy was best highlighted by Jaime Contreras, president of the National Capital Immigration Coalition of Washington, who said, "If we don't have a bill we can live with, we will have a general strike and a general boycott."

Michael Davitt and the Land League

Michael Davitt died a hundred years ago this year. He led the Land League, the first successful popular movement against the power of landlords. His legacy remains an inspiration for today. The Rossport Five, in their fight against Shell, have seen themselves as carrying on the same tradition.

By Conor Kostick

Michael Davitt was born in 1846 to an impoverished Mayo family, who were evicted from their home in 1852, at the height of the famine. They emigrated to Lancashire where Davitt obtained an education from his parents but also from the Protestant and Dissenting churches competing for followers in the local working class communities.

It is perhaps from this experience that Davitt formed his life-long opposition to any form of religious sectarianism, a spirit that is echoed in principle in the modern Davitt League's advocacy of "a multi-cultural Ireland that respects everyone equally".

At the age of 11 Davitt went to work in a cotton mill. The Victorian cotton mills of Lancashire are now notorious for the callous indifference with which they used up the lives and limbs of their child workers. Within a year of starting work Davitt was a victim of the non-stop machinery, with his right arm being trapped and crushed. It was amputated near the shoulder. Determinedly, he taught himself to write again, now with his left hand.

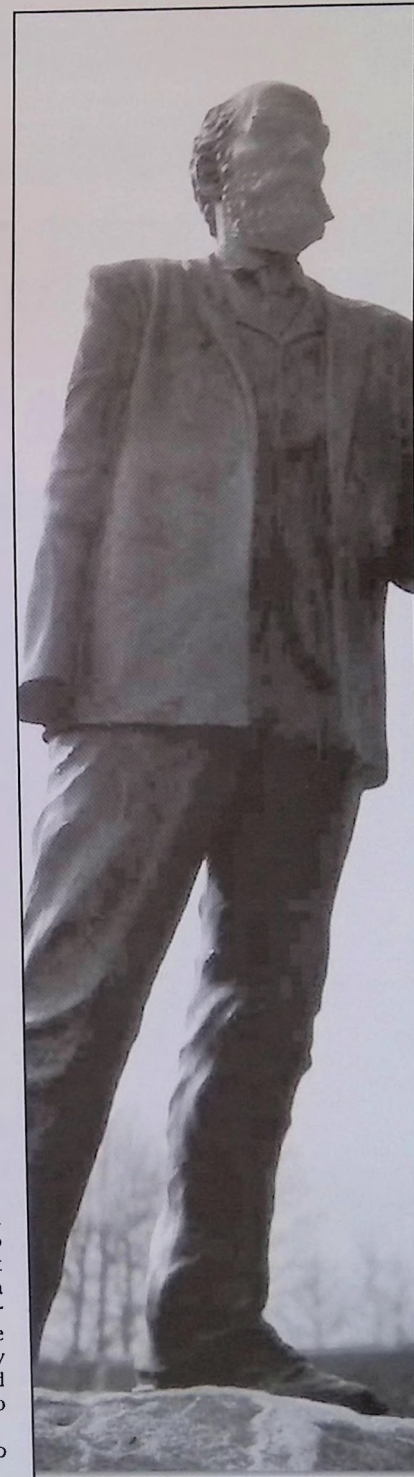
Davitt's disability did not prevent him throwing himself wholeheartedly into political life. For someone without any formal schooling, Davitt developed an astonishing skill with the written word, especially evident in his political writings. He joined the Fenians and participated in the '67 Rising.

By 1870 he was a key organiser of the scattered rebel movement but infiltration by British Intelligence led to his being arrested. Prison at that time was an ordeal designed to shatter body and spirit. Davitt was put to hard tasks, such as stone-breaking one-handed with a pick, or being strapped into a harness in order to haul a cart. Only after the harness wore away his shoulder stump did the prison authorities relent to the extent of making him instead pound rotten bones into manure.

The desperate conditions faced by Davitt were drawn attention to in Westminster and in 1877 he was paroled, on condition of good behaviour. Davitt soon recovered from his prison years and proved he was far from being broken.

He emerged determined to implement a new course of action that embodied two fundamental organising principles: that political action had to be open and gain a popular following and that the way to stir the people of Ireland was to organise around the question that most materially affected their lives, which in the 1870's and 1880's was the question of tenant rights to land.

Davitt was the first I.R.B. member to



conduct open political rallies and his new approach was supported by John Devoy in America. These two Fenians then sought for allies in the political elite of the national movement and found one in Parnell. The Land League was born of a fusion of two political traditions, those physical force nationalists willing to abandon conspiracy in favour of building a mass movement and those parliamentarians willing to sanction popular demonstrations and activity for the sake of revitalising support for Home Rule. Both wings had to face criticism from within their own ranks, but while the alliance lasted it was phenomenally successful.

Massive rallies took place across Ireland in 1879 and 1880, laying the basis for action. Landlords were to be stopped from making evictions by a tactic so successful that its implementation, first of all against Captain Boycott, gave a new term to the world. Landlords who attempted evictions were now met with a complete embargo. In Captain Boycott's case he could get no one to work for him, no labourer, coachman, servant, stableman. No shopkeeper would serve him, even the twelve year old post boy would not deliver his mail. Although Boycott became a cause célèbre for loyalists, who raised funds and voluntary labour for him, Boycott was defeated by these means and left Ireland.

Michael Davitt was at the heart of the Land League, its tireless organiser. This was his greatest moment. The British Government's response was to break the movement with the carrot and the stick, arresting Davitt in 1881 and imprisoning him without trial on the grounds of breach of his release conditions. A thousand other activists soon followed Davitt to jail, but at the same time a Land Act made considerable concessions to the demands of the movement.

Protest at Davitt's arrest was massive, including tens of thousands marching in London, from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square. In Parliament itself Parnell and his followers were expelled for their disruption of proceedings. But here the movement faltered and divided along its main fault line. Davitt urged the immediate calling of a complete rent strike across Ireland. At that moment such an act would have been immensely popular.

The Irish parliamentarians hesitated, met together, and then came back to Westminster to make hot-tempered speeches to the kind of audience they were comfortable with. The alternative, to lead a truly huge mass campaign, frightened them. Their surrender of the initiative was an exact repetition of O'Connell's cancellation of the 1843 rally at Clontarf.

By the time of Davitt's release the energy had gone from the Land League, the reforms on offer being sufficient to fragment the enthusiasm of the tenant farmers as, piecemeal, they sought to obtain what they could from the new legislation. Davitt himself, however, was still hugely respected as a champion of the tenant farmer and Mayo returned him to Parliament in 1892.

It was in his second period of imprisonment that Davitt formulated the goal of nationalisation of the land.

In theory, he argued, it should be done without compensation for the landlords, not even the cost of their ferry ticket to Holyhead.

In practice it could be done by government purchase of the land, at a cost of £140 million, which while an immense sum, could be gradually repaid by a ten percent land tax: a tax which would leave the ten-

ant paying only half the rents they were currently paying but with the security of knowing they now owned the land and therefore had the incentive to improve it.

This idea was eminently practical but philosophically alien to both Irish and British politicians, committed as they were to private property. Davitt's supporters in this idea were not to be found in Westminster but in the emerging socialist movement in Britain, with whom he now associated himself.

Nor did political games among the British elite suit a man who had grown up in the harshest of conditions and who had built a movement that had awoken a country.

Davitt resigned his seat in 1896 telling Parliament that "no just cause can succeed here unless backed by physical force." Until his death in 1906 he remained an ally

of the Irish poor and British trade unions, although he did not live long enough to appreciate the revolutionary significance of the emerging Irish urban working class movement.

In words that are uncannily relevant to the struggle of the Rosport 5 today, James Connolly summed up his view of the power of Davitt's movement when he wrote, "The strength and power of the political agitation of the Land League lay in the fact that its representatives were the servants and mouthpieces of a class who were already organised and holding the means of production with a revolutionary intent."

"They were not asking government to give them possession, they were already in defiant possession and demanding that such possession be legalised. Their base of operation was secondarily at the election booth, primarily on the farm."

Repudiate, Renegotiate and Ratify!

MAURA HARRINGTON of the Shell to Sea campaign tells NLJ why Davitt should be remembered.

The centenary of Michael Davitt's death occurs this year. Davitt is remembered by country people as the man who, single-handedly (pun not intended!) reclaimed the "land of Ireland for the people of Ireland".

Davitt's story—eviction from a small farm in Straide, Co. Mayo; emigration to England as an economic refugee and the loss of his right arm in an industrial mill accident at the age of 14 is a story unfortunately still replicated in many parts of the world today, 100 years on.

In 2006 those who wish to keep Davitt's story buried with his mortal remains at Straide will "honour" him with a stamp, a concert and a conference with the usual political one-upmanship. In so doing, they hope that the relevance of Davitt's political ideas to the present day will be lost in a fog of bump.

It is not a little ironic that a parallel to Davitt's fight for the land has, over the past five years, arisen once more in his native county. The cosy relationship between the political parties and the oil companies has been exposed by the reaction of the people of north Mayo to the imposition of a dirty State Corporate deal—no different in style to 100 years ago when people didn't count either—plus ça change.



Huge demonstration last year in support of the Rosport Five

The people of north Mayo, who literally hold the gates against this State Corporate two-step are the real descendants of Davitt. They have highlighted

the Burke giveaway of our oil and gas together with Bertie's complicity in that giveaway, as Minister for Finance in 1992.

As Davitt had the three F's—Fair Rent, Fixity of

Tenure and Free Sale, so we are calling for the three R's in relation to the Burke Bertie giveaway—Repudiate, Renegotiate and Ratify. Together we can do it.

NEW LEFT OPINION

The "past exonerative" and keeping the public confused: The Nuclear Energy Debate in Ireland

by Derry Chambers

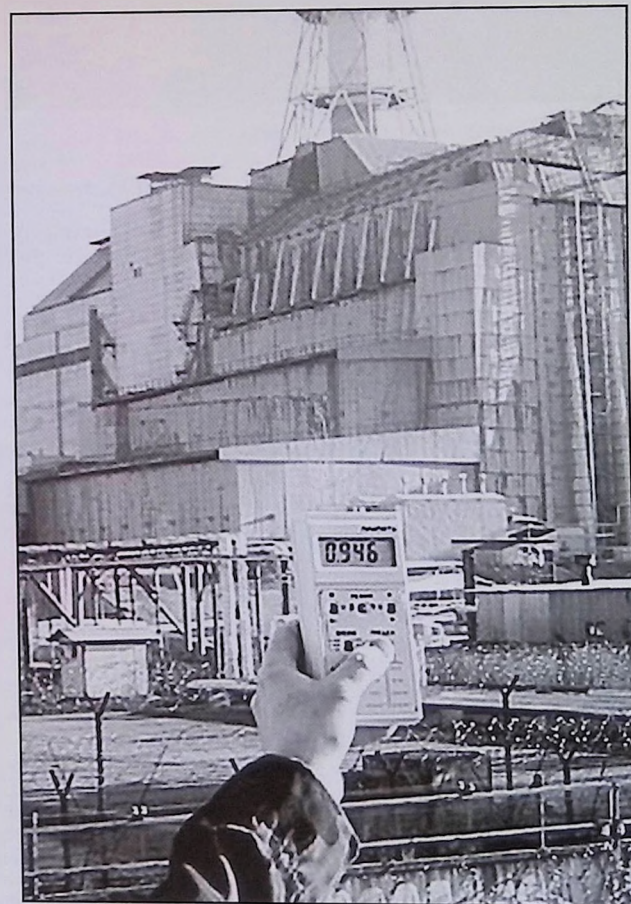
Derry has been an environmental activist in Cork for many years and has written on the need for those in government to clean up their act, not least the Environmental Protection Agency itself.

When Gerry Adams said a few years ago that "they haven't gone away you know", he could just as easily have been talking about the nuclear industry lobby. Following the defeat of the proposal to build four nuclear power plants at Carnsore Point in Co Wexford in the 1970s, the industry has long lain dormant only to re-emerge in recent months with the first tentative steps to convince the nation that nuclear power's time has finally come.

This small, but powerful lobby group has resurrected a campaign, both in the UK and Ireland that still peddles the same old half-truths about this inherently dangerous industry.

Once again we are being told that we are in the midst of an "energy crisis" and that nuclear power is the only solution to our problems.

The propaganda remains unchanged, and for those of us long enough in the tooth to remember, the proclamations, warnings and exhortations will hold a familiar ring, heard again and again since Britain's first nuclear power plant began operations at Calder Hall in



Measuring the radioactivity at Chernobyl

1956.

The 1950s was the nuclear golden age when its proponents were heralding a brave new world in which this wonder technology would provide "Power for Pence".

Twenty years later in

Ireland, Dessie O'Malley, the industry's main mouthpiece in government in Ireland at the time, would go even further and declare that this energy would be so cheap, "it would hardly be worth metering".

By the time the public

became aware of the true costs associated with nuclear energy—the leaks of contaminated materials, explosions, the disposal of wastes (much of which remained radioactive for hundreds of thousands of years), the leukaemias, the cancers—it was too late. Nuclear power stations were, by then, littered across the globe.

When public questioning of the safety of nuclear power began to cause unease, the industry took their lead from Dwight D Eisenhower's infamous advice when he urged them at that time to "keep the public confused" on the issue.

And this desire to cause confusion in the public mind regarding the merits or otherwise of nuclear power generation remains a central activity of the industry to the present day.

Speaking at an "alternative energy" conference in the University of Limerick recently Dr Edward Walsh, former President of the university, mounted a comprehensive defence of the nuclear industry by adopting the little known grammatical concept, "the past exonerative".

Dr Walsh informed the audience, and through the media, the public, "that opposition to nuclear energy is based on irrational fear fed by Hollywood style fiction, the green movement and the media". He further suggested that "We must stop fretting over the minute statistical risk of cancer from chemicals or radiation".

However Dr Walsh wa

only warming up at this stage, because he then went on to inform his audience that the "incident" (the nuclear industry never has accidents) at Chernobyl in 1986 caused a mere 56 deaths.

Dr Walsh was quoting from a report, published earlier this year by the Chernobyl Forum, a UN sponsored investigation of the consequences of the Chernobyl accident, which had among its contributors the very powerful, and pro-nuclear industry, International Atomic Energy Agency.

As the audience gasped in astonishment at this revelation, the good "Doctor" very admirably resisted what must surely have been a strong temptation to "gild the lily" further by explaining the real causes of the health problems associated with the "incident".

According to the "experts" employed in the compilation of the Chernobyl Forum Report, "Many of the health problems and complaints in the regions around Chernobyl were connected with unhealthy lifestyles and with a culture of victimisation."

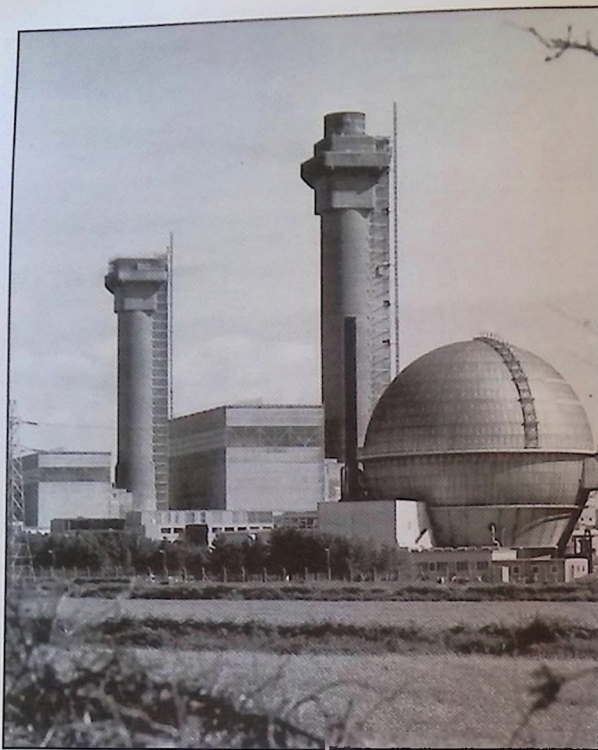
This news will surely come as a relief to the medics in Minsk, who in 2003 reported a 10,000 fold increase in thyroid cancer and a 250% increase in congenital problems in the area.

This followed the exposure of the local population in 1986 to radiation 90 times greater than that suffered by the residents of Hiroshima after the dropping of "Big Bertha". Clearly, if Dr Walsh is correct, the dying people of Chernobyl just need to smarten themselves up, adopt a healthy lifestyle and "snap out of it".

We in Ireland shouldn't be too smug when listening to such twaddle. We, too, are subject to official sleight of hand when it comes to nuclear news.

Shortly after the Chernobyl explosion, the plain people of Ireland were told that radioactive contamination in this country was minimal.

In fact it was reassuringly announced that only one sheep at Roche's Point in Cork Harbour and one head of cabbage in Co Kerry had measured above the permitted levels. So clearly, in Ireland we had nothing to worry about. It was some years before the public discovered that only a single sheep and a single cabbage in the entire country had, in fact, been measured for radioactivity at



Windscale nuclear power station in England

that time.

The debate in this country over the coming few years, while, hopefully, less fanciful, will, no doubt, centre on equally confusing sets of "facts". Of course industry experts will suggest, as they always do, that the public should remain outside of this discussion as sort of bemused spectators.

In this ideal industry world, qualification to debate an issue directly effecting one's life, is dependent, in the words of Dr Ed, on whether or not one is "scientifically literate".

In such a technocracy, with the public relegated to the sidelines, and as gas and oil prices soar, it would be relatively easy to advance the nuclear lobby's point of view and convince the average punter pouring €50 notes into his petrol tank that an oil crisis equates to an energy crisis.

Joe Public will be even more convinced as he drives home each day and hears over and over on his car radio that electricity and gas prices are "set to rise again".

Within a few years of listening to this one sided nonsense we would all "know" that unless we build nuclear power stations, the Celtic Tiger will die, our jobs will disappear, our houses will be repossessed, the cat will go hungry, our children will emigrate and we will be

back to those terrible dark days of the eighties.

And, perhaps unwittingly, the media will also play its part in convincing the "scientifically illiterate" that such is the case by adopting the standard approach we are all familiar with in environmental debates. TV stations will film pro-nuclear contributors in white coats in laboratories or against hallowed university backdrops, while alternative views are presented by rain sodden "activists" in a field, screaming to make themselves heard above the wind.

In the public mind, largely moulded by such TV "infomercials" it is clear which side in the debate will seem the most rational and believable.

Despite these disadvantages there will always be a few simple unscientific individuals around who believe in quaint ideas like democracy and common sense.

They will demand their birthright, as citizens, to be heard, as indeed they did successfully in the late 70s. They will bring their frugal scientific knowledge to the table. They will say simple incontrovertible things like; energy cannot be created nor destroyed; oil in itself is not energy, uranium is not energy. They will point to the massive energy in the form of waves lashing our shoreline

every day.

They will continue to howl above the untapped winds roaring across our little island.

They will point to the huge tracts of fallow land on which rape seed could be grown and they will ask the fundamental questions: why, when there is so much untapped energy around us, is there an energy crisis and why are we preparing to embrace the most potentially dangerous technology imaginable?

The answers to such questions are simple and clear. There is an energy crisis, not because of the scarcity and inherent dangers associated with the use of fossil fuels, but because we have failed to adopt an integrated approach in our management of the renewable energies available to us.

Setting aside the appalling wastage of energy through inefficient existing systems, it is a simple fact that there is enough naturally occurring energy in the form of geothermal, wave, wind and solar power available in Ireland alone, if tapped, to supply the whole of Europe with electricity.

Even capturing a tiny percentage of such power would readily take care of this country's needs well into the future. Critics of such a vision argue that developing the necessary technologies would entail investing hundreds of millions of Euros.

Yet these same people have no difficulty in proposing the spending of tens, if not hundreds, of billions in constructing nuclear power plants with all the attendant dangers.

John F Kennedy once said that "We enjoy the comforts of our opinions without the discomfort of thought". At this early stage in the nuclear debate perhaps now is the time for a few discomfiting thoughts.

Surely it is time to ask a few fundamental questions of the nuclear lobby in Ireland. For instance, is there a long term plan to replace Moneypoint and Tarbert with a nuclear facility right at Limerick University's backdoor? If such a plan exists, it may go somewhat towards explaining the motivation behind Dr Walsh's disgraceful and sickening denial of the suffering inflicted by the nuclear industry on the victims of Chernobyl.

INTERVIEW KEVIN HIGGINS:

Humour with a sting in the tail



Kevin Higgins is fast becoming one of Ireland's most popular and accomplished poets and poetry performers. He won the 2003 Cuirt Grand Slam and his debut collection 'The Boy with No Face', published by Salmon Poetry, sold out within months of publication and is shortly to be reissued.

His work manages the rare feat of being both unashamedly political and cliché-free. His poems are often humorous, but they always have a deadly intent. He is subversive, iconoclastic and always engaging. Kevin Higgins poems should be read by all those interested in the contemporary crossover between radical politics and radical art.

Here he is interviewed by the SWP's Dave Lordan, winner of the 2005 Patrick Kavanagh Award.

Dave: Do you see any connection between your teenage involvement in radical politics and your later decision to start writing?

Kevin: There's a definite connection, yes. It's not that I see writing poetry as being a continuation of my previous political activism.

When I was at my most politically active, during the anti-poll tax movement in London in the early nineteen nineties, I would have seen writing poetry as something over sensitive middle-class types in Hampstead or Trinity College did; something that wasn't really for me. I was a bit of a workerist in those days, I'm afraid!

That said I always had a great interest in the way words play off each other. I usually got the job of writing the leaflet, or penning the letter-to-editor. I tended to take a satirical approach.

Black humour really appeals to me, whereas the sort of high earnestness you get from some on the Left doesn't. I believe that getting people to laugh at your enemies is an important part of winning any argument. In my letters to the editor I would try to skewer the Tory, Fianna Fail or right wing Labour opponent with some sort of satirical punch-line.

A lot of my poems—even those that aren't overtly political—work in that way. So I started out writing letters-to-the-editor, and ended up a poet!

Dave: How has your involvement in the very vibrant performance poetry scene in Galway influenced your work?

Kevin: It's a great way of keeping directly in touch with what new poets are doing. The poetry scene in Galway is buzzing right now.

So many new poets emerging; so many lively, well-attended readings. The most interesting thing about the Galway scene now is the way it's slipped free of the usual categorisation. Here, there is increasingly less of a divide between performance poetry and what might elsewhere be called the mainstream.

Performance poets attend and take part in mainstream literary readings; while more traditional poets often take part in poetry slams. So, there is this great cross-pollination, with poets all learning from each other in what is a remarkably open and democratic scene.

Dave: There is a new, and I think fruitful tension emerging in Irish poetry. On the one side we have the poetry of the established literary magazines and publishers, always technically accomplished, but somewhat predictable and self-obsessed. On the other we have a poetry that is more orally centred and performance based, and more overtly political and iconoclastic, coming out of the mushrooming slam scene. Would it be fair to say that your work is, at one level, an attempt at resolving that tension—breathing new life into the old, while raising the artistic standard of the new?

Kevin: I suppose, yes, that is what I'm trying to do. I have no time for what I call "poetry fundamentalism", people who are capable of dismissing with the wave of a hand an entire genre of poetry, be it performance, traditional or experimental.

One of the legacies of Stalinism is that we know how dangerous it is to have an absolutist attitude to art. Like any art, poetry is about freedom; at its best it is a glimpse of how the world could be.

I think that many of the best new Irish poets of the next ten years might well emerge from the performance poetry scene.

As long as it doesn't cut itself off from the rest of the poetry world—that's the key thing—performance poetry has the potential

to be a great positive influence over the next while. It probably won't last forever. But like punk rock, by the time it departs for the museum, it may have changed all poetry irreversibly. I have no doubt that if the young Mayakovsky was alive and living in Ireland at the moment, he'd be taking part in the Cuirt Poetry Grand Slam.

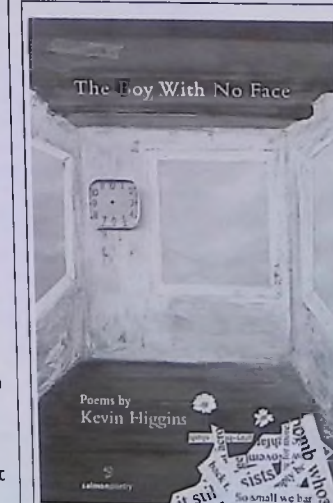
Dave: Lastly, what do you think poetry can add to the social movements?

Kevin: Poetry can certainly be a great adjunct to any social movement. It has been very prominent in the opposition to the war in Iraq, with all the various anthologies. It's great that this have happened.

Every big political movement will in time develop its own particular culture, and poetry will always be part of that. My most political poems are perhaps my most popular. So, there clearly is a big demand for political poetry.

But I think it's very important that social and political movements on the Left give poets the freedom to also write poems which don't serve the cause; in fact, taking it a little further, to write poems which ask inconvenient questions of, and even satirise, their own side.

This is a hugely important freedom, which must always be defended.



PAGE FROM THE DIARY OF AN OFFICIALLY APPROVED PERSON

By day, your new blonde hair and state-sponsored smile are twin planks in the Government's anti-poverty strategy, as you put on your enthusiasm and treat another seminar to an orgy of flip-charts; then play Mayors and Ministers off against each other over the much anticipated beef stroganoff. No-one noticing the names being underlined in red in the twilight Politburo of your mind.

By night, you sit alone in a mansion called Equality, and listen to the moans, from some far basement, of those whose nervous hands questioned this expense account, that clerk's timely suicide; openly defied whole conference-loads of otherwise unanimous applause.

KEVIN HIGGINS

What are workers' councils?

Imagine a city in the grip of a general strike. Power is down, transport at a standstill. Who then takes charge of the basic necessities for life? If the strike is a militant one, the participants will not want to listen to the commands of the old authorities, instead they will look to their own organisations.

Workers' councils, or "soviets" as they have often been called after the Russian experience of 1905, come into being to solve the practical problems raised by the declaration of a general strike.

Who gives permission for the bakers to continue work? Who issues permits for transport? Who allows a certain amount of power to be generated for hospitals? In each case workers turn to their strike committee, and the strike committee of any one section of the working class movement finds itself having to co-ordinate with other sections.

If the general strike did not begin with a city-wide group of strike leaders, necessity soon creates one. Invariably such a workers' council finds itself dealing with matters normally in the hands of the state. If the strike is a long one, they organise refuse collection, policing and even the distribution of money.

Although it has been a generation since workers' councils were last seen, in fact the historical experience is rich, beginning with a revolutionary general strike in 1905 in Russia.

That year, on 19 September, typesetters at a Moscow printworks struck because they were only being paid for letters and not punctuation marks. This tiny detail contains a great lesson: that the most inconsequential dispute can give rise to mass movements under the right circumstances, like the random clap of a bird's wing causing an avalanche if snow has accumulated sufficiently on a mountainside.

For within two weeks all the printers of Moscow and St. Petersburg were on strike, and railway workers on the Moscow-Kazan line, joined them on October 7th. Gradually the entire railway network ground to a halt and soon factory after factory joined the strike.

On October 13th workers from the engineering, cabinet-making and tobacco industries sent their delegates to meet with the printers and decide a course of action. The St. Petersburg soviet was born and declared a political general strike.

"Soviet" simply means

QUESTIONS FOR SOCIALISTS



Berlin: The placard at the left reads: "All Power to the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils."

council, but in 1905 this was the world's very first example of a new form of government, a new representative body of the working class. The soviet was made up of delegates who had been elected from their workplace. As more and more factories joined the strike, they too sent representatives to the soviet until it had 562 delegates representing some 200,000 workers.

They started their own newspaper, Izvestia, to inform their supporters, and the public in general, of their actions as well as to counter the lies of the right wing press. Their meetings became the centre of public life, for great issues of state, such as the right of Poland to independence, as well as for local issues of a practical nature.

Only 26 years old, but confident in his understanding of events, a young Jewish man became its chairperson: Leon Trotsky.

He later wrote: "The soviet's premises were always crowded with petitioners and plaintiffs of all kinds—mostly workers, domestic servants, shop assistants, peasants, soldiers and sailors." People called in to check if their journey might be interrupted by a rail strike; to apply for written exemptions to certain strike rules; to ask for instructions on whether to join the strike. Latvians approached the soviet to ask for assistance in ending the declaration of martial law in their country.

The all-encompassing nature of the soviet was shown by the

fact that people from the countryside wrote to it with the simple address: "The Workers' Government, Petersburg". In December 1905 the soviet was suppressed, despite a brave attempt in Moscow to organise a rising against the encircling army. In large part the defeat arose because this was the first experience of revolutionary struggle for the working class; but the lessons of that year, preserved especially in the form of the Bolshevik Party, were invaluable for the return of revolution in 1917.

The proof that the experience of 1905 provides a general model of what a working class government looks like comes from the fact that "soviet" type organisations occur every time working class militancy reaches a great height. So, for example, they have been seen all over Europe, including Ireland 1919-20; Spain 1936; Hungary 1956; Chile 1973; Portugal 1974; Iran 1979; and Poland 1980.

There are several lessons worth drawing from these experiences. Firstly, such workers' councils are a spontaneous development from a mass working class movement. It is the many problems created by great strikes: how to organise food, transport or control of the media that impel workers to come together in this way. Soviets cannot exist in periods of low levels of strike activity.

Secondly a soviet system is far more democratic than a parliamentary one. Because the

delegates are from collective constituencies, the workplace, and not geographical ones they can be swiftly recalled and new delegates replace them.

There is no such recall system in even the most advanced parliament. Furthermore the parliamentary representative, even the most sincere one, deals with politics that are separated from economics. A parliament can decree that women should receive equal pay to men, but whether that is implemented is another question. Employers often find their way out of such legislation.

But if the workers themselves are making such decisions then their impact is immediate. Because it is made up of those who actually run society, the working class, a soviet matches words to deeds.

Thirdly, the soviet and any other form of capitalist government, dictatorship or democracy, cannot exist side-by-side forever. One or the other must eventually assume full power in society.

Only once, in Russia 1917, was it the soviets that replaced the capitalist state until invasion and isolation led to counter-revolution. On every other occasion it was the workers' councils that disintegrated, often through direct repression, but sometimes also because of the reformist politics of those who led them.

Workers' councils of some kind are an indispensable mechanism for the shift of real power away from corporations and into the hands of workers.

Today the shape of workers councils may look very different to earlier forms. Women, black workers, newly arrived immigrant workers, white collar workers, will put their own stamp on how they are run, the priorities they choose, how they use new forms of communication. But whatever they look like, this kind of bottom-up democracy is necessary to create the basis for real social change and revolution.

Alongside this form of popular power, is also needed a conscious political project to progress the movement and deal with opposition and contending strategies. There has to exist a critical mass of socialists who see the possibilities of workers councils and argue for them to realise their full potential as the truly democratic structures of popular government.

—Conor Kostick

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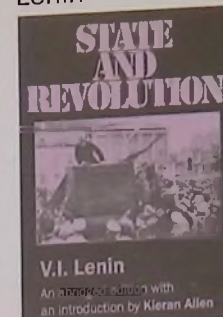
A World to Win,
Nos 1 & 2



Many publications and books are available published by authors within the tradition of the SWP and its sister organisations. But for those who want a briefer survey of some of the key questions, a series of small pamphlets reproducing articles which cover the main outlines of the politics of the Socialist Workers Party is now being published. These pamphlets will be useful, we hope, to socialists and anti-capitalists, whether recent participants in the struggle or more long standing, who want to know more about the politics of the SWP. The first two are now available price 50cent plus postage

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State & Revolution
Lenin



Lenin's State and Revolution is one of the most subversive books ever written. It tackles the prevailing idea that the state stands above society and represents the common good. It roots its argument for revolution in the fact that even a parliamentary democracy is a form of concentrated class rule. When the elections are over, there is quite simply "one law for the rich and another for the rest". We live in a society where there is a "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie", according to Lenin. Lenin has been demonised as a tyrant who paved the way for Stalin. But even the most cursory reading of State and Revolution shows he wanted a much more profound form of democracy. This abridged edition aims to make the arguments of State and Revolution even more accessible to modern activists. Price €3 plus postage

James Connolly:
Revolutionary
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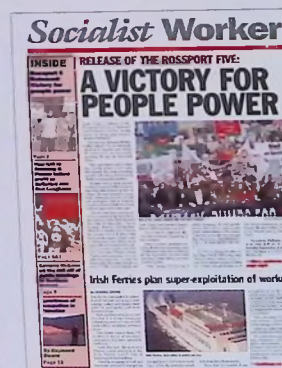
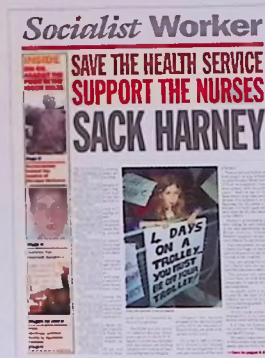
Author's note
Most of the material for this pamphlet is based on the book I wrote in 1990, The Politics of James Connolly, which is now out of print. Today far more opportunities have opened up for socialists—and with that more questions. Principally how do comparatively small numbers of revolutionaries connect with vast numbers who believe that capitalism has become "extreme" and out of control. In revisiting some of the material I was surprised at just how contemporary Connolly's writing is for those who are striving for 21st century socialism. Above all else Connolly was, as the pamphlet I hope demonstrates, a revolutionary socialist. That singular fact is source of a deep embarrassment for the political elite €3 plus postage

Why is the Irish
Health Service in
Crisis?
Dr Peadar O'Grady



"How can it be that, despite such unbelievable wealth, we have a health service that is now worse than it was in the 1980s when the country was in the depths of recession and threatened with bankruptcy?"
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Crooks and chancers in the neoliberal playground

Nationalist and Unionist leaders repeatedly reassure their followers that they won't sell out their principles in order to get back into government at Stormont.

Meanwhile, the sell-off of public assets to private interests proceeds apace, without much comment, never mind resistance, from the Green and Orange parties.

Water provides the most obvious example. Peter Hain's plans are well under way for privatising the water service by April next year and imposing charges to ensure that the private owners rake in a profit.

None of the four main parties supports non-payment of charges as a way of challenging Hain's plan. But neither do they offer an alternative strategy.

When pressed, they say that issues such as water charges have to be put on hold until the way forward for the Agreement is worked out. But what happens if they succeed in working things out?

If a power-sharing Executive is formed in November and takes over responsibility for water just four or five months ahead of the planned privatisation, what will the main parties do to avert what they agree would be a disaster for the people? They don't say.

The suspicion in many minds is that they'd be content to take office in circumstances where they could argue that privatisation and plans for charges are already too far advanced and, unfortunately, that there's nothing they can do.

So they'll load the blame onto Hain while putting his plan into practice.

It's to be noted that while the parties put these issues on hold pending the outcome of talks, there's no question of the NIO or the "business community" following suit.

Plans for reshaping the economy in favour of the rich continue at full spate. It's only opposition, or potential opposition, which is postponed

BACKCHAT EAMONN MCCANN

for the duration

The result is that the North has become a neoliberal playground in which all manner of crooks and chancers frolic to their hearts' content, while elected representatives, including those who sometimes style themselves "socialists," observe from the sidelines and make a virtue of refusing to intervene.

Since the "hologram Assembly" reconvened at Stormont, Sinn Féin and the SDLP have been exchanging insults over the SDLP participating in debates on economic issues. They are giving credence to a phoney institution instead of demanding full restoration of the Assembly and Executive, complain the Shinnners. And they have a point.

The British direct rulers don't have to pay heed to the debating society on the hill.

The SDLP are making fools of themselves.

But when it comes to taking meaningful action which the NIO would have to pay attention to, there's no distinction between Sinn Féin and its nationalist rival.

On water charges, privatisation, outsourcing civil service jobs, selection in education etc., the Sinn Féin line is that there's little can be done until "the institutions are up and running."

The difference between the two Nationalist parties is that one wants to pass the time in meaningless chatter, the other prefers to stand on the sidelines looking principled.

But whatever their differences on how to restore the Assembly, there is nothing to prevent any party immediately throwing its weight into Communities Against the

Water Tax, or backing NIPSA's opposition to Workplace 2020—whereby all buildings in the public sector are to be flogged off to private developers—or campaigning for industrial action against job losses, at the Prudential in Belfast, for example.

The reason they don't take up these challenges is not only



Minister Peter Hain

that they are focused almost exclusively on Orange-Green issues. It's also because, underneath, they have bought into neoliberalism.

They either fully accept it (most of the DUP and UUP) or believe it's futile to oppose it (most of Sinn Féin and the SDLP).

So, they argue at the top of their voices about who should run the North, while giving the neoliberals the nod to get on with it.

The parties reveal their true colours where they already have some power—in relation to the council-owned City of Derry Airport, for example. The DUP, Sinn Féin and the SDLP (the UUP is effectively defunct in Derry) all

give full backing to Ryanair's demand for the eviction of families near the airport in order to facilitate expansion required by Ryanair's new fleet of Boeings.

All have voted to appeal in the High Court in London against a Freedom of Information ruling that the council should tell the public the information on which it based the pro-Ryanair decision. Sinn Féin in Derry is aggressively unapologetic about its role in this matter.

The rule of neoliberalism more generally is clear from the workings of Invest Northern Ireland (INI), the official body shaping the future of the NI economy.

Its chairman, appointed by Hain last January, is Stephen Kingon, who is also managing partner of PriceWaterhouseCoopers (NI).

The INI website explains that Kingon "is expected to devote at least four days per month to INI business"—at £800 a day, on top of his PWC (NI) salary.

PWC is one of the major companies pushing privatisation worldwide. PWC (NI) is the main consultancy firm working for the Northern Ireland Office.

It was revealed in a Commons reply last December that it has undertaken projects in association with the Departments of Culture Arts and Leisure; the Environment; Regional Development; First and Deputy First Minister; Finance and Personnel; Enterprise Trade and Industry; and Education.

To engage in heated (or tepid) debate about the devolution of power and democratic accountability in the North without reference to PWC (NI) and other such outfits is not just to ignore the glaringly obvious but is to create a smokescreen for the neoliberals to hide behind as they pursue their anti-working class agenda.

All four major Northern parties have been complicit in providing this smokescreen.